

STONY LONESOME

ARTHUR J. RUSSELL

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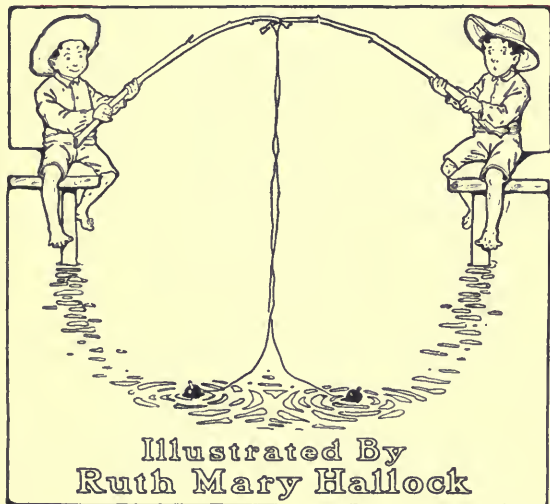
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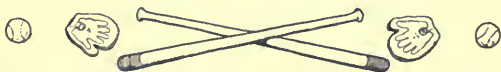
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Stony Lonesome

By Arthur J. Russell



Illustrated By
Ruth Mary Hallock



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TO
THE MEMORY OF
“DOC” (ROLAND C.) BOWMAN,
CARTOONIST AND POET,
HONORABLE MAN AND LOVING FRIEND

Stony Lonesome

CHAPTER I

In Which the Reader Obtains His First Glimpse of the Town and of Its "Prominent Citizens."

"HELLO, Peewee, whatcher doin'?"
"Nothin'."

Peewee Jackson was certainly a very small boy; when you got to know him, it was equally certain that he "was small" spiritually. Peewee's parents had called him Henry because he had an uncle of that name; but the boys had rechristened him Peewee because the name fitted him.

Peewee had started to grow, but he had been caught in an eddy. His little trousers had begun to bag at the knees, but they had been cut off in the middle of the bag, and looked as if they had been stopped too suddenly and were suffering from the shock. The boy seemed to be an altogether useless and



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unnecessary addition to the town—a sort of afterthought. Yet there was a good deal of the boy in Peewee, too. He car-



ried about with him a few rods of twine, a sling-shot, a half pint of dried peas, and some stolen apples. He was a moody and quiet boy, but like other still waters he was deep. Having built himself

up on detective stories, he had an idea that he was very keen in ferreting out crime. His anxiety to get at the bottom of whatever occurred in Stony Lonesome had won for him the dislike of the other boys, who did not care to have such little derelictions as window smashing and apple stealing traced to them, and for this reason they had acquired a habit of laying all these crimes at Peewee's door. Because of these unjust charges, Peewee's face had come to wear an expression of pained surprise.



At the time the question recorded above was asked, the hose had been cut at the schoolhouse fire, and indignant firemen had ripped off pickets from the

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fence with the intention of using them about the persons of certain of the boys. Peewee Jackson's name was naturally mentioned in this connection, and search was made for him, but, lo, he was not.

Shorty Hitchcock had found him sitting on the edge of the wharf whittling a shingle.

"Hello, Peewee whatcher doin'?"

"Nothin'."

"Where you been?"

"Nowhere."

"They're lookin' for you."

"I don't care. Let 'em look."

"The schoolhouse's a-fire."

"What of it?"

"She's out now."

"Umph!"

"They said you set her."

"I never."

"Well, you cut the hose."

"You're a ——!"

"You dassent say that again."

"Don't hafter."

"Well, you'd better not."

"Why not?"

"Never you mind."



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"I'd mind if I wanted to."

"Well, 'twouldn't be safe for you."

"Why not?"

"Never mind why not."

"I'd mind if I wanted to."



If the controversy had been carried on between great nations, this would have been called "the diplomatic interchange of notes." It is politer in the case of nations, perhaps, but the meaning is the same.

Shorty Hitchcock, Spot Maloney, and Slim Jones did not associate much with Peewee, because he did not assimilate with the "Stony Lonesome Gang." Peewee was not "clubable." He was a lone fisherman, not dependent on companionship. He was a tramp steamer picking up business where it could be found. On the other hand, Shorty, Spot, Slim Jones, the fat boy, and Stubby Jones, his tall brother, were bound together by pretty strong ties, although as a rule they hunted in couples.

Then there was another solitary pine in Stony Lonesome. Reference is made to that model child, Frankie Foster. The

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boys had a particular spite against Frankie because he was neatly dressed, gentlemanly in his manners, and kept his nails clean and his hands white and soft. There were bent pins always waiting, oh, so quietly and softly, in Frankie's seat, and when Spot Maloney sat on Frankie's new stiff hat, and then kicked him on the shins for having it, great was the joy in the Stony Lonesome schoolhouse yard. And all for no other reason than that Frankie was a nice boy and a gentleman. Of all the methods used to make Frankie Foster's simple and kindly life miserable, I am ashamed to speak; but you know what boys can do.



One day in school Frankie burst out crying. He cried in a quiet and heart-broken way, and for a few minutes the gang felt mean. The conspirators tried to grin or to look unconscious, but they all felt "low." The abuse had gone so far that even Frankie could not stand it any longer.

The teacher also rose to the occasion, and two of the worst outlaws of the

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school "caught it bad" that day. Spot Maloney was freckled, stubby in person, and stubborn in disposition, and he didn't mind it much; but Shorty Hitchcock was sensitive and felt the disgrace keenly. It wasn't altogether "the lickin'" that hurt, but his conscience troubled him for bullyragging Frankie Foster. And all Stony Lonesome heard of the affair and was glad that the boys had been "caught up with" at last.

The town expressed this joy outwardly when the victims appeared on the street. Spot didn't mind this much either, but Shorty kept away from "downtown" and loafed around the lanes and barns and out in the pasture where the ferns grew and where there was a nice, fresh, woodsy smell in the air. For everything back of Stony Lonesome was woods and fields.

Stony Lonesome! No very ardent admirer, unless sadly deficient in humor, could have affixed a name like this to a town. I cannot remember that the name had any offensive significance. It stood, rather, for everything that was romantic and adventurous.

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From a boy's point of view it was an interesting and busy town. No matter how little was going on in the shops, the boys charged the atmosphere of the place with expectation and excitement. And when the fire engines that propelled their streams of water by hand power came out

at night for practice, how could any one truthfully say that the place was dull?

These hand engines, known as Tiger No. 2 and Torrent No. 1, did not give their exhibition on any regularly appointed day, and it was impossible to fore-

cast just when this great event of the week was to come off. The warning was usually given by some Paul Revere running breathlessly down the street and hollering to all his friends as he passed:

"She's goin' to squirt!"

Then every boy dropped chores, baseball, marbles, or whatever he happened to be engaged in, and made a bee line



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for downtown. The engines were on the river bank, and two lines of firemen in their shirt sleeves were manning the brakes and waiting for the signal. A crowd of men stood around discussing the merits of the two engines.



Every boy in town knew the fine points and records of each tub, and was a loyal supporter of one or the other. Nearly all the advocates of the Torrent were Republicans. The "Tigers" were Jacksonian Democrats or their descendants. The Torrent was the more conservative tub; the Tiger had more of what has been called Americanism. You could tell a boy's characteristics by the engine he championed.

The captain of each machine stood on the top of it, a figure of great power and an object of envy. As the brakes began slowly to move he swayed back and forth. Then, as the men warmed up to their work, he yelled:



“aa.”

“Break her down! Take it out of her!”

The brakes rose and fell with the regularity and rapidity of machinery. A yell from the main street showed that the

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water had taken a sudden spurt, and had wet the group of small boys who were



showing off by standing ven-

turesomely in front

of the stream. Wild

shouts of joy greeted each

spurt of water in advance of

the record. Presently the

gang at the brakes tired out,

the stream fell back, and

finally ceased, and two men

with a tape measure ascertained what had been done.

During the trial Uncle Ellery Marsh stood in the street in his customary attitude, watching the stream of water with the eye of an expert, and telling about "the record we made with the old Tiger over to Louiston, b' George!"

Uncle Ellery was a sort of a town oracle who could tell you the history of every family in the place for a hundred years back, and throw it into dramatic form, too. On many incidents that might as well have been forgotten Uncle Ellery's memory had a tenacious grip. But it was for

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the dramatic interest in them, not for their wickedness.

"You see," said Uncle Ellery, "we are all young ones growed up. When we were children we ust t' be naughty sometimes, but, bless you, it didn't amount to nothin'. After we get growed up some of us are bad, too; but that don't amount to nothin' either. It's so small the Almighty can't see it."

When the boys were up to their tricks Uncle Ellery always had an excuse for them. Some man with a grievance would detail his troubles in public with threats of vengeance, but Uncle Ellery would say:

"Wal, wal, now. If you could look at that as the boys do, it would be funny. If 'twasn't funny they wouldn't do it. Of course, to our way of looking at things, them boys' actions don't seem to be governed by good sense nor reason."

Uncle Ellery kept a little cabinet shop on the main street, where he turned out everything that could be fashioned from wood, beginning with cradles and ending with coffins. He had a shrewd and kindly philosophy, and he was loaded to the

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muzzle with anecdotes of the past, with Indian stories, and with incidents of adventure and sport. He was very thin. They called him "spare" in Stony Lonesome. He had strange curves in his figure, acquired from a habit of standing with his right hand on his right hip and his left hand on his left knee, forming a truss support for his body according to the approved principles of mechanics. This he did when he was resting. When he was working or walking you would have said that he was made of whalebone.



Uncle Ellery told us once that a boy was never grown up until it hurt him to fall out of a tree. This remark was drawn out by the fact that Spot Maloney had just taken a pretty severe tumble and was bragging to Uncle Ellery that it "never hurt me a bit."

If there were no trees to be shinned, if the engine didn't squirt, if the baseball game didn't come off, or the boys got

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tired of following up Uncle Ellery, they could generally be found loafing under the big elm trees in front of Peewee Jackson's yard. One long summer evening Shorty Hitchcock and Spot Maloney were in the middle of an exciting game of knife on this pleasant green. Presently the onlookers were attracted by Stubby Jones, who stood by himself absorbed in unwrapping a rag from his sore finger. Proud of occupying the center of the stage, Stubby slowly unwound the rag, and the boys surveyed the injured member with varying emotions.

"My! Ain't that a buster!"

"She's a fright!"

"How'd you do it, Stub?"

"I got my knife sharpened down to the new house on the oil stone. When I was whittlin' t'words me, she slipped."



Stubby carefully wound the rag around his finger again and tucked it in his pocket out of the way of danger.

"Why don't yer have it sewed up, Stub?"

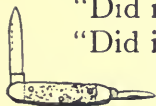
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"Sew nothin' up!"

"Pussy Clement had two stitches taken in his lip when he fell off the barn."

"Did it hurt yer, Puss?"

"Did it? I wouldn't have it done again for fifty cents."



"She'll heal up herself, if you let her alone and don't wash her."

"I know she will; soap's no good for cuts."

At this point some other incident would in the nature of things have attracted general attention, or the crowd would have drifted back to the knife contest, had not Peewee reached over with a long, elastic cord and snapped it at Stub's wounded finger. The attempt was not so much to inflict personal injury as to express contempt for the value of the attraction Stub was offering.

"Whatcher tryin' to do?"

"Nothin'!"

"Well, you want to quit it, that's all."

"What's the matter, Stub?" asked Shorty Hitchcock, suspending the game and looking up.

"Nothin', only Peewee tried to hit my sore finger."

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'Whatcher want to do that for, Pee-wee?' asked Shorty.

"I didn't go to do it. It just slipped."

"Slipped nothin'," Stub protested; "I saw you do it a-purpus."

"That's all right."

"Well, it ain't all right, and you can't make it all right, either, durn you!"

The boys looked at each other fiercely.

"Lick him, Stub, if he does it again," suggested Shorty.

Stubby intimated that he could do it quick and plenty and with one hand tied behind his back. Pee-wee grumbled, but made no further effort to provoke hostilities. Stub turned slowly to watch the game.

"Where are you now?" asked Spot.

"I'm at kneein's. You missed at earin's."

"Hold on! That's a miss. It's my earin's again."

Shorty made his "earin's" and prodded the knife into the ground safely at "fistin's." At "nosin's" and at "elbowin's" he was likewise successful. He missed the point, however, at "teethin's," and



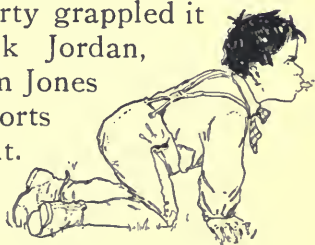
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Spot took the knife and continued. The game ebbed and flowed till Spot "mowed the grass" successfully and won out. That made it necessary for Shorty to "root the peg."

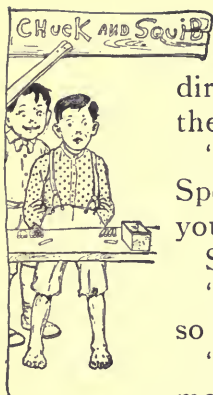
A peg of wood about as thick as a lead pencil was whittled out an inch long and sharpened at one end. Spot was entitled to stick this peg into the ground, and, holding his knife by the blade, to strike the peg three blows. Mean boys used to get in an extra blow if the other boy wasn't sharp. Shorty, the loser of the game, was obliged to get down and up-root this peg with his teeth. It was only the "lowest down" kind of a boy who would for a moment think of refusing this fair tribute to his opponent's prowess. It was a question of the severest boy honor.

Spot drove in the peg till it was level with the sod, and Shorty grappled it with his teeth. Speck Jordan, Noony Norris, and Slim Jones watched his frantic efforts and hollered with delight.

"Root 'er, Shorty! Grub her up!" was the



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encouragement Shorty received until he came up, dirty faced and hot, but bearing the peg between his teeth.

"That's the stuff!" exclaimed Spot, admiringly. "I didn't think you'd get her."

Shorty grunted.

"You needn't a-punched her in so hard. I'll get even with you!"

"Say," said Spot, anxious to mollify his old friend, "let's go over to Chuck & Squib's store, an' I'll buy the cigars."

Chuck & Squib was a firm of commercial importance, and rated high in Stony Lonesome. The partners were Chuck Hollins and Squib Strong, boys with natural business instincts that drove them to "keep store" about as soon as they were put into short pantaloons, and to get nearly all the marbles and pins away from the other boys in the neighborhood. The principal articles on sale at their store were cigars made of sweet fern leaves or of hay seed. There were two grades of these cigars, the "Sweet Firm"

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at eight pins each, and the "Hay Seed" at five pins each. The "half-lengths" brought six and three pins each.

The cigars were made by rolling pieces of newspaper around a pencil and pasting them. These cases were then slipped off and stuffed with dried sweet fern leaves or hay seed. The hay seed had in time grown unpopular because of poisonous seeds or chaff in the hay, which, together with the printer's ink on the newspaper cases, had a tendency to give the boys using them sore mouths, and mothers had gone to the length of prohibiting them. Yet, because of the low price, they were still used.

For a moment the boys were absorbed in the prospect of a smoke.

"All right, come on!" said Spot. "Hold on there, durn you, what are you doing?"

"What's the matter, Spot?" asked Shorty.

"Slim Jones spit crossways of me. It's dead sure to rain Saturday."

"What do you mean?" continued Spot, evidently growing angrier.



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"We're goin' berryin' Saturday." The fat boy grinned.

"You needn't be so durn partickerler. Guess a feller can spit if he wants to. They ain't no law against it."

"Wall, I wouldn't be so gosh durned mean."

"No, you wouldn't!"

"Naw, I wouldn't!"

"Guess I'll be mean if I want to."

"You're a fatty."

"Say there, don't you give me none of your face. I won't stand for it."

"Then you can set down for it."

"I don't have to set down for any little runt like you."

This was too much. Although Spot was small, it did not take him five seconds to take off his jacket and jump on the Jones boy. But Slim was strong if he was not quick, and he was larger than Spot. He unlimbered several heavy batteries and went into action.

"Gorry! Slim Jones and Spot's a-fight-in'!"

A yell of delight arose.

"Row! Row! Make a ring! Make a ring!"

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The boys gathered into a ring and encouraged the combatants with loud shouts.

"Swipe 'im, Spot! O—o, wasn't that a good one!"

"Meller his head!"

"Lamm him, Spot!"

Two or three men passed by and laughed, but did not attempt to interfere. Slim Jones soon had his opponent down and was sitting on him, while Spot bit, scratched, kicked, and pummeled blindly.

At this point Mrs. Jackson, annoyed by the fray under her windows, bounced out of the front gate and made directly for the boys.

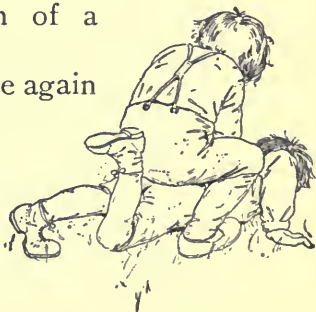
The crowd scattered like chaff in every direction. Even Slim Jones got away in spite of his weight.

"That warn't much of a fight."

Shorty and Spot were again on their way to the cigar store.

"Slim Jones was too big for you."

"He'd no business



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to spit crossways, anyway. I'll bet it'll rain Saturday."

"If it does, we'll go to the cave an' read *Moccasin Mose*."

"Skatin' bugs are awful thick after it rains."

"That's so. Monty Choate killed one once, and he found a cent down in front of the postoffice next day."



"You kill a skatin' bug an' you're sure to find a cent."

"I killed two last spring an' I never found a cent."

"Well, it was there, but you didn't see it. Monty said he's tried it lots of times."

"Well, I s'pose it's so; the boys all say so."

"It's sure."

"Where'd you get them pins?"

"Minn had 'em on her cushion."

"Gorry! Won't she lamm you?"

"She don't dare to; I got something I can tell on her."

"Girls ain't no good."

"Most girls ain't, but Minn's pretty good. She kin tell a bully story."



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"It's a girl's story."

"No, it ain't. It's a fairy story and Brownies."

"Shucks, that girl stuff! 'Tain't Injuns an' robbers."

"They's fairies and witches, too, and they can turn you into toads."



"J'ever touch a toad and git warts?"

"I never touch 'em; but if you tie a string around a wart, an' rub a bean on it an' bury the bean, the wart'll go away."

"I know it. Slim Jones tried it and the wart went away in a week."

"What yer goin' to buy, Hay Seed or Sweet Firm?"

"I'll get two short Sweet Firms, I guess."

"Look out he don't work off soakers on you."

"You bet."

"Soakers" were fair on the outside but stuffed with barnyard refuse and pieces of old shoes. The idea was to work off these inferior brands on personal enemies or on smaller boys who did not know the difference. If they protested against



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this treatment, they found themselves in trouble.

Having bought two short Sweet Ferns, the boys sat down on the sidewalk outside of Mrs. Hollin's yard to smoke them.

"These ain't soakers."

"No, they're all right."

W // // // "Say, why couldn't we run a store?
W // // // Chuck's makin' no end o' pins."

W // // // "I know it. Mrs. Hollins told ma
I // // // she didn't know what to do with the
pins Chuck gave her. She's got two salt
boxes full."

"Let's go down to the house and start a store in the barn."

"We ain't got any sweet firm."

"Let's go up in the pasture an' get a bunch."

"Say, I'll tell you somethin' better than that. Let's go and buy a bunch of cigars of Chuck & Squib and sell 'em again higher."

The idea was attractive and grew on the boys as they discussed it. After much bargaining with Chuck, they secured ten "long ones" and ten "short ones" of the Sweet Fern brand at seven and four pins

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apiece. They agreed to pay the next day, but Spot had to put up his baseball for security. That is, if the new firm did not pay over one hundred and ten pins to Chuck & Squib by the next day, the baseball was to belong to Chuck.

The boys hurried to the Hitchcock barn and soon had a sign out, reading:

SHORTY & SPOT
SIGARS

All the boys in Stony Lonesome heard of the new venture and in a little while Speck Jordan, Slim Jones, and Pussy Clement strolled around with their hands in their pockets in a careless sort of way, to investigate.

"Whatcher got to sell?"

"Cigars. Want to buy?"

"Naw. What are they wuth?"

"The long ones is nine pins an' the short ones six pins apiece."

A yell of derision greeted the senior partner's remark.



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"Shucks! We can get 'em for eight and five pins down to Chuck's place."

"No, you can't."

This contradiction was so palpably a straining of the truth that it carried no weight. Every boy knew what cigars were worth. The other boys only walked around, kicking at pieces of wood and looking over the barn.



The two partners went aside and consulted.

"Say, we got to sell 'em at Chuck's price. We'll make a pin apiece then, and they won't buy unless we do."

"A pin apiece ain't enough."

"Well, we'll have to take it till we get goin'."

The boys went back and announced that the price of cigars had fallen to eight and five pins.

Speck Jordan was the spokesman of the gang. He said:

"We can get them down to Chuck's for that. What's the use of buyin' of you fellers?"

"These is better than Chuck's."

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"Naw, they ain't. They come from there."

"Well, that's the price."

"Come on, fellers, let's go down to Chuck's."

This threat was too much for the avarice of the new firm.

"Hold on, what'll you give for 'em?"

"We'll give three and six pins apiece, an' no more. Come on, boys."

"Hold on! You can have 'em."

Shorty Hitchcock's idea was to call Speck Jordan's bluff. He had begun to think the boys hadn't any pins, for they were not visible in the lapels of their jackets. To his immense astonishment, Slim Jones drew a whole paper of pins out of his pocket and carefully counted out ninety. This took some time, as both sides suspected underhanded work of some kind and were as suspicious of each other as strange dogs.

"There's your money. Hand over your cigars."

"Guess I won't trade."

"Shucks! You said you would."

The gang was mad clear through and



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ready to fight. Shorty Hitchcock slowly counted over the cigars again and handed them out. Then the boys scuttled away, whooping and laughing. Across the street behind a fence Peewee Jackson lay hidden, craning his neck to find out what was going on.

The two partners looked at each other blankly.

"Say, let's quit the store business."

And another heavy firm went down; assets, nothing; liabilities, twenty pins.

Of course the boys spread the story over the town, and whoops of derision greeted the members of the defunct firm when they appeared in the school yard or on the street. When Shorty went



into Uncle Ellery's cabinet shop one day to fool with the edged tools, he found that Uncle Ellery knew all the sickening details of their failure. Shorty right then and there made up his mind to run away.

"Uncle El," he said, "I'm tired of this measly old town.

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Everybody knows every-
thing you do."

Uncle Ellery's eyes twinkled.

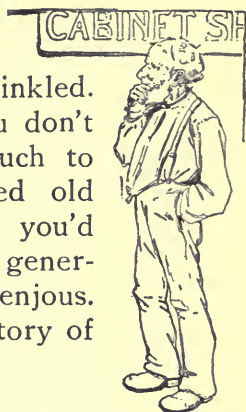
"Now, boy," he said, "you don't want to take that too much to heart. S'pose your darned old store had succeeded and you'd got rich. The calls on your generosity would 'a' been tremendous. Did I ever tell you the story of the prosperous rooster?"

"No, what is she?"

"Wal, you see, the price of eggs was steep, and the rooster felt considerable inflated in his own esteem. He was talking with the turkey gobbler one day, and remarked:

" 'We're turnin' out a sooperior artickle of eggs this year. The workmanship is everything that can be desired and the goods is natty, up-to-date, and fetchin'.' "

"The rooster stood on one leg, and held the other claw up impressively. The turkey gobbler opened up his tail and spread his feathers impressively, too, to show that he was not behind the rooster in good feelin's.



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“‘Yes,’ continued the bird, ‘I now hev seventy hens workin’ for me in my egg factory, all making a good livin’ and able to indulge in little bits of ribbon and other personal adornments. There is a man takes everything we projuce. A standing order, see?’



“An’ right here who should come along but Mrs. Hen an’ ask a little money for shoppin’ purposes. You ought to hev seen the change that came over that rooster.

“‘My dear,’ he cackled, ‘do you want to break me? With eggs at this price and nothin’ doin’, it’s an outrage. I haven’t got a thing with me but a little chicken feed in my pocket.’

“The hen thought she might make this do, and the old rooster, sort of unwillingly, you know, drags out a handful of corn and oats and passes it over. Then along comes the goose and wants money to get a new pole for the poultry roost, an’ another rooster steps up with a bill for scratchin’ in the garden for the chickens.



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In about fifteen minutes the prosperous rooster was rejuiced to a point where he went and stood in a corner of the barnyard on one leg, not carin' if he was alive or dead an' wonderin' how long it would be before he was plumb broke, anyhow.

"It doesn't *always* pay to make a fy-nancial success."

"Well," said Shorty, "the firm of Shorty & Spot wasn't busted by too much fy-nancial success, anyhow."

Shorty and Uncle Ellery laughed, and Shorty felt a little better for the story, but he didn't like to hear it mentioned, and several fights over the matter were narrowly avoided before the boys forgot it.

As Shorty came out of the shop he noticed Peewee Jackson on the other side of the street, standing in front of a tempting store window. Shorty gave the incident no thought. Little did he suspect that Peewee was playing the part of "Old Sleuth." Shorty's accusation that Peewee had set fire to the schoolhouse



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and had interfered with the hose had cut Peewee to the quick. It called for vengeance! And Peewee Jackson was on the trail!

CHAPTER II

In Which the Boys Find the Buried Treasure in the Pirates' Cave.



THE boys had been reading *The Last of the Mohicans*, and the personality of Shorty Hitchcock had been merged in that of Chingachgook. As soon as Shorty had assumed this noble character, trying to live and to think it in his daily walk and conversation, Spot Maloney became Uncas. These two Indians were often seen stealing cautiously along the fences, trailing their guns, or walking backward in the beds of imaginary streams so as to throw the Hurons off the scent. In those bloody days many an unfortunate small boy in Stony Lonesome was struck with wonder and fear at the discharge of vocal firearms, and at the sudden onslaught of Indians who scalped their victims, and then disappeared into their native fastnesses.

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It was Saturday and, in spite of Slim Jones' indiscretion, it was not raining. The boys had scanned the sky anxiously, and were much puzzled that the omen of the early part of the week had not brought disaster.

"I'll bet it's raining down on the coast," said Shorty.

"It's dead sure to be rainin somewhere," replied Spot.

"I saw him spit crossways, didn't you?"

"P'raps he just missed it."

"Say, let's paint up and go up to the cave."

"Where you going to get your paint?"

"I dunno."

"Minn's got some paints in her room that she makes flowers out of."

"Let's look at 'em."

The boys clattered up the back stairs. Mrs. Hitchcock glanced at them with suspicion, but she was too busy to investigate, and the quiet that



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settled on the house made her forget them. Chingachgook and Uncas, streaked with ochre and vermillion, were soon creeping cautiously down the hall.

"Sh! We can't go down the stairs; ma'll nab us."

"Let's climb down the porch."

"Bully!"

"Where's the guns?"

"They're out on the back fence."



The boys slipped from the window to the porch roof and clambered down the apple tree that hung over it. It was eminently the proper thing to do. Shorty had three streaks of yellow across his forehead and three of red on each cheek and a bit of each on his chin. Spot was also in war paint. If Mrs. Hitchcock had seen them, the troops might have been called out.

"Cut for the back fence."

"Take a little corn along to roast."

The boys slipped through the garden and were soon lost to view in the dense

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forest of sweet corn. Having secured the guns, marvelous instruments sawed or whittled out of wood, they slipped through the fence to a back street, where they met Sam, the village negro, face to face.

"Fo' God!" exclaimed the astonished colored man. "What yo' all done got on yo' count'nances? Yah, yah, yah!"

The boys started and ran.

"Say, Spot, shall we drop 'im?"

"Won't the noise of the guns bring the Hurons down on us?"

"We can walk backwards in the water and cover our trail."

"All right, you drop 'im."

Chingachgook rested his rifle against a tree and drew a long bead on the unsuspecting negro, who was now far down the street.

"Bang!!"

"Shall we slip back an' scalp 'im?"

"No, the Hurons are all around us. Sh! Drop for your life!"



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The boys fell flat on their stomachs, and wiggled and squirmed their way under the fence and in among the trees of Slim Jones' yard. Then they arose, looked carefully around, and, bent nearly double, with their guns trailing, ran swiftly from tree to tree.

"Guess we've thrown em off the scent," said Spot, breathlessly.

"The varmints are awful cunning," replied Shorty, suspiciously examining a broken branch. "I don't like the looks of this."

"Let's take to the water."

The boys stepped into an imaginary stream and waded the length of the yard.

"Hello, there! What's the row?"

It was Slim Jones, the fat boy, who was watching them with great interest from the porch.

"S—sh! Drop for your life! The Hurons is on our trail!"

Slim Jones dropped like a bag of sand, and wormed his way to the side of the scouts.

"How we goin' to escape?" he puffed.

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"Git your gun! We're goin' to make for the cave. It's our last chance!"

Slim Jones doubled heavily on his trail and made for the barn. He soon reappeared bearing his trusty rifle. It had several notches cut in the stock, indicating the number of hostile Indians Slim had slain.

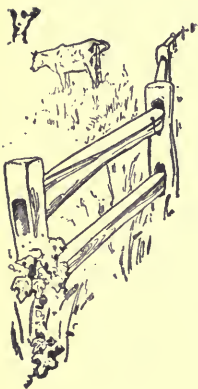
"Now let's make a dash for the woods. We'll surprise them before they have time to fire."

The three boys, half crawling, half running, trailed across the field back of Slim Jones' house, then over the fence and through the pasture lot. A herd of cows, peacefully chewing the cud, looked at them with large eyes, but made no move. Spot Maloney could not resist the temptation. Bang! He had shot at them.

"Hold on, you durn fool! What you doing that for?"

"We've got to have some buffalo meat for supper."

"No, we ain't neither. We can't light



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a fire to-night. It will bring the Hurons down on us."

Shorty shielded his eyes with his hand and swept the horizon anxiously.

"That was an injoo-dicious shot. I don't like the indications."

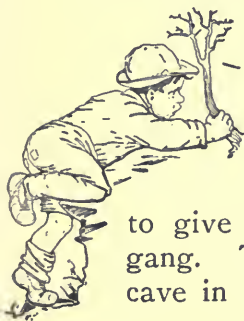
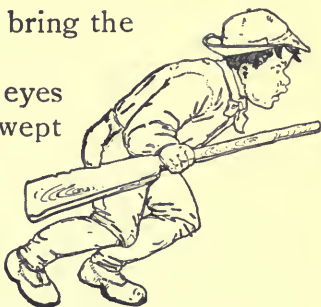
"Aw, get out! I say we got to have some game for supper."

"Trap it, then. We can't take chances."

The boys were now on the edge of the woods and moved along freely without any precautions. There was a series of cliffs and rocky cañons ahead of them, which were known as the first, second, and third cliffs. The first cliff was generally the limit of the ex-

plorations of the smaller fry. The second and third cliffs were considered sufficiently remote and deep in the recesses of the forest

to give honorable shelter to the gang. There was a pretty good cave in the first cliff, but it was too



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generally known to be of much interest. When the first cliff was reached, Slim Jones began to show signs of fatigue.

"Say, let's stop at the first cliff and dig the cave in further."

"'Tain't safe," replied Spot. "They're too close to us. Besides, nothing but the kids go there."

"Let's go to the Pirates' Cave in back of the second cliff," suggested Shorty. "We're pretty safe there."

"I ain't goin' there," protested Slim; "it's too durn far."

"Oh, get out! You come along. It's only the next cliff."

"Naw, I won't do it."

"Well, stay here if you want, then. Me an' Spot's going to find some treasure an' make a fire an' trap game an' get something to eat."

The idea of something to eat stirred the fat boy like a bugle call.

"You ain't got any matches."

Shorty put his hand in his pocket and drew out half a dozen dirty matches.

"Whatcher got to eat?"

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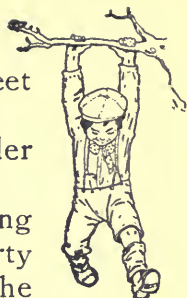
Spot carefully unrolled a paper and showed three ears of sweet corn.

"Roast corn and jerked buffaler meat ain't so bad."

Slim's objections were melting away, and he followed the party as they plunged again into the forest and were soon lost to view.

Climbing the second cliff was a poser for Slim Jones, but he finally made it, and sat down to get his breath while Shorty and Spot were dashing around, rolling boulders down the cliff, banging at imaginary game, or jumping from the rocks and catching small trees for a swing in a way that would have thrown their mothers into hysterics.

When Slim had recovered his breath and the other boys had tired of the fun, they climbed over the rocks farther into the tall timber, which was divided near the cliff into two parts by a rocky gorge. On one side of this gorge the rocks had fallen away in titanic confusion, making



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a fine fireplace. Farther down the gorge on the same side was a deep cave. The boys looked around with exultation.

"Say, ain't this great!"

"Bully!"

"Ever been up here before, Slim?"

"No. Pop Rollins told me about it, though. He said pirates came up the river and buried somethin' in it."

"Shucks! How does Pop know?"

"He says Uncle Ellery told him one day up to the graveyard, and pointed out the place so he knew it."

"Why didn't Pop dig for it?"

"He did, but he says the bottom of the cave was solid rock and there warn't nothin' buried in it."

"Thunder! Let's go see!"

The boys made a dive for the cave and crawled into the dark, cavernous opening. The floor of the place was carpeted with dead leaves, blown in by the wind. These the boys scratched away.

"Gosh! It's all rock!" said Shorty.



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They sat down and looked around discontentedly.

"Perhaps it was another cave."

"P'raps."

Spot Maloney was prying away at a rock wedged in at the farther end of the cave.

"Say, she's loose!"

Hope sprang up like a fountain in the hearts of the boys. Here was, if not a mystery, at least something to work on. A boy is not satisfied if he is not expending his energy, provided only that this energy is not expended on chores, or what is considered work in the technical sense. That is utter weariness, even before it is begun.



"Brace against the rock, Spot," said Shorty, "an' git yer feet against it. Git under it, Slim."

The rock came out with a jerk, and the boys fell in a heap, with the rock on Shorty's leg.

"O—o! Roll her off, Spot! She's breaking my leg."

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Slim and Spot put their weight to it, and Shorty got out from under and sat down to see if he was all right. When the damage was found to consist merely of a little broken skin, the boys turned to the hole in the wall. It was small, but it opened into something, and they were filled with the lust for adventure and treasure.

"You crawl in, Shorty; you're the slim-mest," said Spot.

Shorty looked at the dark hole dubiously.

"I don't want to."

"Why not?"

"P'raps there's a hole in there that'll let a feller down so's he can't get back."

"Throw a rock in and listen."

The rock dropped in without any reverberations from the bowels of the earth. But the place was as dark as pitch.

"You crawl in, Spot."

"I can't get through."

"Try it."

"It ain't no use. You're the smallest."

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"Perhaps the skellerton of the pirate's buried over the money," suggested Slim.

This suggestion was not well received.

"Wonder if his durned old ghost's guardin' the treasure."



"What if 'tis? He couldn't walk only at midnight."

"That's so. And there wouldn't be any money only at midnight. It disappears at day-time, they say."

"We might come up and dig at midnight," suggested Slim Jones.

"Well, that's a good one. How yer goin' to wake up?"

"Keep awake till then an' climb out the winder."

"Why not let Slim crawl in?"

This suggestion was received with laughter, but Slim took offense at it, and there might have been trouble if Spot Maloney had not at this time recovered from the pirate's ghost scare and begun to back into the hole, kicking around with his feet to see if there was a firm bottom.



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"How does she feel, Spot?"

"All right. Leggo my arms! I can't kick."

Spot wormed and pushed and crowded and grunted, but finally, after a supreme effort, his shoulders went through and he disappeared.

"Spot!"

"What?"

"What's in there?"

"Nothin'."

"How big is she?"

"'Bout as big as the other. Gimme a match."

The match was handed in, and the two boys outside saw Spot light it and look around.

"The floor's dirt! Yessir! I can dig in it!"

"Say, it's the pirate's cave, for sure!"

"You'll find the skellerton first." This comforting remark was volunteered by Slim Jones.

Spot stopped digging.

"Guess I'll come out now."

"Whaffor?"

"We'll have to have a shovel."

"That's so."



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Silence for a moment.

"O—o! O—o!"

"What is it?"

"I've got something!"

"What is it? What is it?"

Spot's head and hand appeared at the opening, the latter grasping a claw-full of dirt and two or three indelible pencils in glass cases. The boys pounced on them and took them to the opening of the cave to get a better light.

A loud clamor arose inside. Spot was trying to get out to examine them also, but found that he was stuck fast.



"Say, Shorty! Shorty! Slim! I can't get out! Help!"

The boys crawled back and tried to pull Spot out, but his shoulders were wedged in between the rocks. He started to cry, but Shorty cut him off.

"Cork up! We'll get you out. Stop kickin'. Let's see what we'd better do."

The boys held a council of war, and then Spot had another time of ineffective squirming and kicking.

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"Say, we'll have to go down and get a stonecutter."

"What, an' leave me here all the afternoon! No, you don't!"

Slim Jones, who had been looking around, had at this point an inspiration.

"Get back in, Spot, an' we'll take a rock an' make the hole bigger."

Spot squirmed back and with big stones the boys pounded away at the sides of the opening. Chips of the rock fell off from time to time, as a lucky hit was made, and soon Spot, torn and dirty, crawled out.

"My gosh! I wouldn't go in there again for nothin'."

"You crawl in, Shorty," suggested Slim Jones.

"Naw! Git out."

"We'll git a shovel and a hammer an' come again," suggested Spot.

"That's so."

The boys eyed the glass cases and the indelible pencils greedily.

"Ain't they great?"

"You bet!"

"Say, we must stop up that hole again."

The boulder was rolled back into place

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and the chinks and crevices filled with moss and earth.

"There now, swear not to tell."

The boys held up their heads and "crossed their throats" with their forefingers, repeating the formula:

"Cross yer throat
Black and blue!
Lay me down,
An' cut me in two!"

As they were making their way home, laden with this dark, mysterious secret, the bushes were pushed cautiously aside, and the conspirators were watched by a pair of stealthy eyes.

Ha! It was Peewee Jackson, the Avenger!

The pencils were divided and Shorty hid his in the haymow.

This incident was destined to have an important influence on the lives of the gang. It takes a very small thing to make a boy happy, and he falls into the opposite state with equal facility. The hidden pencils reposing so quietly in their glass



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cases became a tremendous burden on Shorty's mind. It was not until after he had gone to bed that the terrible situation flashed upon him. He wondered that he had not thought of it before. He had read in the paper that Spaulding's stationery store had been entered by burg-



lars. Shorty felt sure that they had planted their plunder in the cave and that he and Spot and Slim had found it.

"My gracious! What if we are found with stolen property in our possession!" he thought to himself, breaking out into a cold perspiration. "There would be a policeman up here in fifteen minutes."

Shorty's dreams thereafter became troubled with visions of uniforms, detectives, reform schools, and jails.

He ate his breakfast gloomily the next morning, and the cloud did not rise over the Sabbath. He laid the case before his partners in the crime, and gloom settled in a heavy pall over the rest of the gang also, although Shorty took the matter

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most to heart. On Monday every boy's hand appeared to be against him. Several boys knocked his cap off, and fights were narrowly averted.

"What have I got to live for, anyway?" he thought to himself. "Everybody will be kicking at me worse than ever, when they know about it. I believe I'll run away and go out on the plains."

And Shorty did not yet know the worst. After the boys had left the cave, Peewee Jackson, scouting along their trail, made his way into the place and carefully examined the traces left by them in their hurried departure. What Peewee wanted now was a clue. If he could get that, he would hold the fate of the gang in the hollow of his hand!

Peewee made a hurried search but could find nothing. He failed to notice the concealed entrance and came to the conclusion that the gang had carried their "plant" away. Then he stole cau-



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tiously through the forest looking for footprints in the soft mold, carefully examining the broken branches and keeping a sharp watch-out for Indians. The thing to do, he concluded, was to shadow Shorty as much as possible and to make a secret search of his barn at the first opportunity. Before he went to bed that night Peewee Jackson cut a deep notch in the handle of his tomahawk.



CHAPTER III

In Which Uncle Ellery Makes a Plea for an Improved Order of Society.

WE LOOK back at boyhood through a glamour. In perspective the hard lines are worn away and the rough places take on the mellowness of distance. But the problems that the boy has to face are as real as those of later life, although he usually encounters them with a freer spirit and in this way is more likely to over-ride them.

Wednesday was always a particularly trying day for Shorty. On the morning of that day the orators of the public schools of Stony Lonesome were given an enforced opportunity to fire the childish hearts of their schoolmates. This particular Wednesday, thanks to the indelible pencils, was more than ever the day when everything went wrong with Shorty.



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He took the platform and started out bravely:

“Friends, I come not here to talk,”

when he caught Slim Jones’ eye and thought of the stolen property in the hay-mow, and of the dark cloud that hung



over the blighted lives of his friends. He lost all connection with the rest of the speech and took his seat amid the derisive laughter of the school. His soul was filled with distaste for the company of his fellow men. To be sure, he laughed louder than anybody else

when Spot Maloney afterwards marched to the edge of the rostrum and began:

“Stan’, the ground’s your own, my braves,”

and then, in shifting his feet, lost his balance and stepped off the edge of the platform, waving his arms in a vain effort to recover himself. But even this happy incident did not allay Shorty’s sense of

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his own humiliating experience, and the boys did not neglect to keep it alive in his breast.

After school he loafed in the swing in the barn thinking matters over; and he decided that his prospects in life had been ruined by his own folly. Yes, and not only that: here he was secreting stolen property and the police likely to swoop down upon him at any moment. This was no ordinary affair. It was a matter of the state's prison and hard labor. He could almost hear Mrs. Watson saying to the neighbors:

"I knew that boy would come to some bad end."

And here he was already within shooting distance of ruin and disgrace. As Shorty sat in the swing, twisting himself up and letting the ropes uncoil themselves, his attention was caught by a square of sunlight thrown on the barn floor by a window. The way it dodged around when he became dizzy puzzled him.



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"I wonder where that sunlight goes when I ain't looking at it," he thought. "S'pose there's nobody in the world looking at it, how do they know it is there?"

Shorty jumped out of the swing and ran into the horse's stall to escape the sunlight. Then he suddenly jumped out at it to see if he could not catch the beam in the act of falling. No, it was too quick for him. He puzzled over this mystery in a desultory way and decided that nobody knew about such things as that.

After supper it rained and then cleared up again. Shorty stood on the bridge over the railroad track watching a stream of water trickle down on the rails. Spot Maloney and Slim Jones soon joined him and became equally absorbed in the phenomenon.

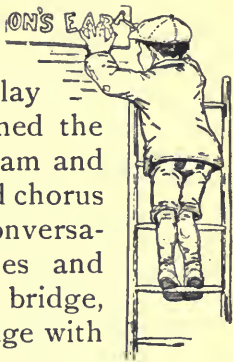
"Say," said Spot, "let's dam her up and let her loose on the train."

This was a brilliant idea. The stream was soon held in check by mud and leaves until a hogshead of water had accumulated that nearly burst all barriers by its own weight. Providence came to the boys' assistance with a gravel



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train. A load of Irish laborers sat along the edges of the flat cars smoking short clay pipes. As the train approached the bridge the boys broke the dam and the water did the rest. A loud chorus of rich and picturesque conversation, accompanied by stones and clubs, came flying up over the bridge, and the boys fled out of range with derisive yells and hoots.



"Wasn't that bully?"

"You bet!"

"Say, Shorty, see that sign up there?"

"Yep."

It was an advertisement of a brand of tobacco popular in those days, and read in large letters, "Chew Jackson's Best." A new bit of slang was just coming into use in Stony Lonesome. An offended boy was accustomed to remark to an enemy, "Say, I'll chew your ear." Spot's alert brain caught the hint. In two minutes the boys were at work with ladders and saws robbing other signs of their letters until they had secured the necessary word. This they nailed over the word

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"best" in the tobacco sign, and the careless world, careless no longer, read the remarkable advice, "Chew Jackson's Ear."

The boys considered this one of the finest jokes on record, and had not the cloud of indelible pencils hung over them, their cups of joy would have run over.

It may seem surprising that a little thing like a handful of indelible pencils should weigh so heavily on the boys' minds, but the childish mind, through racial heredity, is full of fear. It is also very imaginative, and when fear is once aroused it is likely to become dominant.

The boys had it all settled, that by secreting stolen property they had become *participes criminis*. They did not dare confess their discovery for fear that they themselves would be accused of the robbery, and they had argued it out that they could not disprove the charge. Did they not hold a part of the stolen property concealed?

So into the glorious music of summer, with its freedom and wild life, with its baseball, three-old-cat, the swimming

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hole, the hunting and trapping expeditions, and the encounters with hostile Indians, the indelible pencils wove their strain of dissonance, which wore on the spirits of the gang perceptibly. But just as men go to a philosophy or to a religious teacher for help, so in their perplexity the boys were accustomed to go to Uncle Ellery Marsh; and to Uncle Ellery, Shorty now made his way.



Uncle Ellery was a grown-up boy himself. He sympathized with the ways of boys and often joined in their plans and pleasures to the extent of leading parties out to the bog after blackberries, or of taking part in some harmless practical joke. When the boys called on him, Uncle Ellery was wont to go on with his work, planing or polishing a board, accompanying the operation of his hands by a stream of talk or of stories that often held the boys quiet for half an hour or more at a time.

"Uncle Ellery," said Shorty,

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standing against the bench with his hands in his pockets, "I guess I'll run away."

"Em—m—m," said Uncle Ellery, squinting along a coffin board to see if it was straight, "can't ye get enough to eat?"

"Sure! 'Tain't that."

"P'raps you're looking for adventure, bloodshed, cowboys, Indians, and that kind of thing."

Slim Jones and Spot Maloney had strayed into the shop and were running their fingers along the edges of the tools and listening gloomily. Shorty became suddenly conscious of his prominence in the conversation and wriggled uneasily.



"N—no, not exactly."

"Did I ever tell you the story of the wasp and the bee?" asked Uncle Ellery, polishing in the stain that he was applying.

"No, what is it?"

The boys crowded nearer, and Uncle Ellery, without stopping his work, began his story.

"Wal, you see, it was something like this: The bee was out one day about her business as usual, when a wasp who hap-

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pened to meet her said kind o' careless like,

“ ‘How's the honey business?’

“ ‘Good. Thank you for askin,’ said the bee, not stoppin’ her work. ‘I ain’t got any complaint to make of the year’s results. The hive is doing twenty per cent more business than it done last year.’

“Now, you boys know that the wasp is one of those adventurous and military swashbucklers who wear their hats on one side and always carry their swords handy, ready to punish insults. He’s awful quick to take offense, too. He had been amused at the bee for working so much, and as time was hanging kind o’ heavy on his hands, he thought he would have a little fun at her expense.



“ ‘I s’pose you don’t mind tellin’ me what your idea is in getting all that surplus honey, do you?’ he asked, kind of lightly, you know, clanking his sword against his heels and putting on an easy air.

“ ‘No.’ says the bee, ‘I dunno as I do.

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The firm of Bee & Co. isn't working for its health.'

" 'You lay up a lot of extra stuff,' argued the wasp, 'and the man that owns your hive takes it all away.'

" 'We pay a good rent for protection,' replied the bee, 'and we are secure in the prosecution of our business. The hive always gets a good living and is steadily growing in wealth and population.'

"That made the wasp laugh.

" 'We don't need protection.'

" 'No?' asked the bee. 'I noticed that your paper nest on the barn rafters was torn down by the boys last month.'

"That made the wasp awful mad. He

leaped to his feet with a fierce cuss word and drew his weapon.

" 'Cusses on them!' he said in a shrill voice. 'They rued the day that they interfered with us. I raised a bump on the farmer's child as big as a pumpkin.'



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There will be no more nest-tearing. We are rebuilding under the eaves.'

"The bee smiled.

" 'We are taken into the cellar when the cold weather comes. The wasp people are left to freeze to death. We pay for this and we get our money's worth. Our partnership with man is one of our most valuable assets.'

"Here a loud noise arose in the barnyard. The wasp jumped to his feet and drew his sword.

" 'The boys are attacking your nest again,' said the bee, seriously.

"Whatever they may say about the wasp, you boys know that he ain't a coward. He just pulled his hat down over his eyes and jumped in. His conduct in action is dreadfully reckless, and he slashed about regardless, uttering fierce oaths. His first victim was the boy's father. He caught him on the neck and lifted him two feet into the air. Then he struck the cross bull until he saw red and tipped over the corn crib. The boy ran when he saw the trouble, but another wasp handed him one on the



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stocking that made him holler. But the nest was in ruins just the same.

"The bee watched the fight a minute and then went back to her honey gatherin'.

" 'There is only one thing that will save them wasp fellows,' she thought, 'and that is the growth of civilized and commercial idees among them, instead of the idees of

war and conquest. No nation that is founded on war and lickin' other fellows is ever built up permanently; that is, for good and all, you know. It will grow rich for a time, perhaps, from plunder and big taxes, but fightin' teaches idees that bring their own punishment. No truly great

nation can be held together by force and fraud. Manufacturin', trade, and brotherhood are the cornerstones of the beehive. It is bound to prosper so long as it depends on these principles. I can't see nothin' for the wasps but destruction.' "



Uncle Ellery, who was delighted with

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his own performance, looked wisely at the boys.

"Wasps ain't no good, anyway," said Slim Jones. "They's a nest under the sidewalk down by Shorty's house, and they got Mike Quinn on the leg day before yesterday."

"Wal," said Uncle Ellery, "they've probably got their uses, but we don't just know what they are. So they's fellows who have to fight Indians and kill bears so the country can settle up, but it ain't as nice work as it's pictured. No, sir, Stony Lonesome's good enough for me!"

The boys wandered off towards the river, and Uncle Ellery, smiling in self-congratulation, placed another coffin on end against the wall. Then he stopped and thought, "I wonder what them boys have got in their heads. Some deviltry, probably."

Uncle Ellery did not know that so simple a thing as a handful of indelible pencils was keeping his old friend Shorty awake nights. He thought that possibly



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the boy had broken the window in the schoolhouse, a crime which was at that time agitating Stony Lonesome. Or he figured that perhaps the boys knew who did it and that the strain on them in keeping quiet was the cause of their trouble. If fifty thousand dollars had been hidden in the haymow, and the boys had secured it by breaking into the Stony Lonesome Savings Bank, the weight on their minds could hardly have been heavier. Happily, the boy nature is elastic, and he has moments when he rises above his burdens, whether they are represented by two cords of wood that must be sawed into stove lengths, or by the dark and treacherous possibilities that are stored up in hidden plunder.

If Shorty had seen the cautious figure ducking and doubling around his barn in the search for the damning evidence that would make a clear case against him and his gang, the burden would have been a much more intolerable one. As it was,

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both he and the other culprits were blissfully unconscious that Peewee was on the trail, although they felt that the sword of justice was hanging over their heads by a frayed thread.



CHAPTER IV

In Which the Boys Have an Adventure with the Big Bell.



WHILE the boys did not forget the terrible cloud of circumstantial evidence that their fertile minds had called down upon them, there were, nevertheless, bright spots in the darkness. They were, to be sure, living over a sleeping volcano that might blow them sky high at any moment; but where danger is constant we grow familiar with it, and even take a little importance to ourselves over our imperturbability.

The boys were desperately afraid that one of them would tell his father of the find, or would throw himself on the mercy of the court, and they pledged each other to keep the secret until they could agree on what should be done. Meantime, everything was going on without a jar,

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and every day brought its compensations.

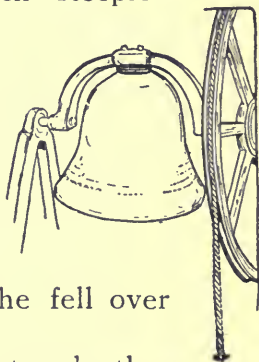
"Say, Shorty, I'll tell you what let's do," said Spot one Wednesday afternoon; "let's set her."

The inspiration seized him as he stood with his hands in his pockets, looking at the big Baptist church steeple.

"Let's set the bell!"

"Gosh! We can't do it."

"Aw, yes we can. We'll tie the tongue an' ring 'er up. Then one fellow can hold her an' the other untie the tongue an' we'll move."



"Gosh! But what if she fell over before we got away?"

The boys stood looking at each other in awe over this fearful possibility. The project they had in mind was to "set" the Baptist bell, a monster chunk of noisy metal that called the people of Stony Lonesome to church on Sunday, rang the noon hour, a curfew alarm at 9 p.m., and was used by anybody and everybody in case of fire or of flood. "Setting the bell,"

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as it is technically termed, is ringing it up until it "stands on its head" and balances there, ready to tip over with a tremendous clangor at the least pull of the rope.

There was a science to bell ringing of the old-fashioned order, in which every boy longed to become an expert. The rope was attached to the wheel in such a way that there was first the long pull, then what is known as the "back stroke." The ringer caught this stroke with a quick pull, adding to the impetus of the bell until it was finally "set," or balanced, with its mouth open to the sky. As the rope slowed up before the bell tipped over the other way, the expert operator seized it and held the bell easily on the balance. If he was not an expert, the bell went over before he caught it, and he was either carried up and bumped against the ceiling, or had a pair of skinned hands to show to his friends. Ringing the bell after it was set consisted in tipping the bell over and up the other side and bringing it back to a set again, with a long pull of the rope, the bell giving out two mighty notes:

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"Boom—m—m——Boom—m—m!"

Shorty Hitchcock and Spot Maloney had often watched the scientific work of the policeman whom Stony Lonesome employed to ring the noon and nine o'clock alarms. In case of fire their first impulse was to practice on the bell and to let the fire go for a half hour or so on the risk that they were proclaiming a false alarm.



But to-day, as they were going by the church, a new and unfortunate idea had taken shape in the mind of Spot Maloney, filling his heart with suppressed excitement.

"Gosh! We'll set 'er an' leave 'er set!"

The idea was to give the next person who attempted to ring the bell a surprise that would lead him to think the building was falling. The door of the vestibule of the church was always open to give access to the bell rope in case of fire, but the boys, to their disgust,

found the door to the steeple stairs carefully locked. Spot, who lived near by,



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hurried home to get a collection of keys, while Shorty sat down in the cool vestibule and read *Moccasin Mose, the Avenger*.

When Spot came back with half a dozen keys, their high hopes were soon extinguished. Not a key would fit.

The boys walked around the great barn-like structure, and in their desperation meditated climbing the trees and trying to drop from them to the roof. Even this wild venture would have proved useless, for the steeple towered high above the sloping roof.

"Say, Spot!"

"What?"

"Where d'you s'pose that cellar window goes to?"

"I dunno."



The basement of the church was in the rear, and the front part or vestibule was built with the floor about a foot above the ground. Even a dog would have had trouble in crawling under it, but the boys were equal to almost anything in the line of strategy, and they wormed themselves through the opening and scraped along

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between the cobwebby floor and the damp ground.

"Say, Spot!"

"What?"

"What if we should get caught in here and couldn't get out?"

"Gosh!"

"Or s'pose a cattymount had cubs in a nest in under here!"

"Or a skunk!"

The boys stopped worming along and listened.

"I don't see no fiery eyes shinin' in the dark, way they did in Deadwood Dick's cave, do you?"

"Naw. What's the use of bein' afraid?"

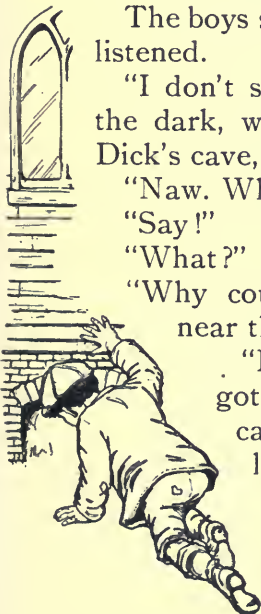
"Say!"

"What?"

"Why couldn't we dig this out up near the wall an' have a cave?"

"My goodness, haven't we got into trouble enough with caves? I seen a detective lookin' at my barn yesterday."

Spot turned sick and white with fear.



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"You never either. You're lyin'."

"Well, p'raps it wasn't a detective. I looked to see if I couldn't see that he had a star on his vest an' I saw somethin' glitter. P'raps 'twas a secret society badge."

"Sure, 'twas a badge. Say, Shorty, don't you let on to your father nothin' about them pencils."

"Well, I guess not."

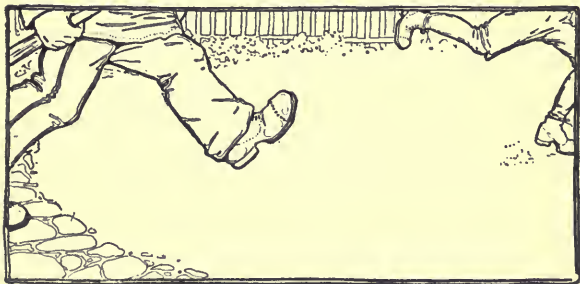
"Swear it?"

"Sure, I'll swear it."

"Hold up your hand."

Shorty held up one grimy paw as best he could in his cramped position, and said:

"I promise never to tell about the plunder until we all agree to tell together. Now you swear, Spot."



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Spot took a similar oath.

"My gracious," said Shorty, "if they caught us they'd slam us into the reform school in fifteen minutes. Don't you ever let on to Peewee Jackson, will you?"

"Peewee!" cried Spot with the utmost contempt. "Wal, I guess not."

"I've seen him twice around my barn. You don't s'pose he's on, do you?"

"Naw."

"Well, I hope not. He'd do us up in ten minutes. Let's move over where it's lighter."

The boys squirmed over toward the front wall where a dim ray of light shone down.

"Say!"

"What?"

"Look at this light. Gol durn, if here isn't a way up into the belfry!"

Both boys looked up between a curve in the plastering and the outer wall of the church, which seemed to run up into the depths of space.

"Say, I bet we can nail some cleats on them beams and climb her."



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"O—o, look! Here's the cleats the carpenter left. I'm going to shin her."

"Say, you'll fall and break your neck."

"Naw, I won't neither."



Spot clambered up the side of the wall like a monkey, and pretty soon Shorty heard him whisper back:

"Come on, I'm in the attic."

The wild sense of adventure, craftiness, and Indian cunning had full control now, and Shorty clambered up and soon crouched under the roof beside his brother desperado. They crawled carefully along the rafters and finally, breathless and perspiring, covered with cobwebs, dust, and dirt, sat gleefully together on the belfry ladder.

"Ain't this great!"

"Bully good! It beats Injuns."

They looked up to the trapdoor into the belfry.

"Gosh! Hope she ain't locked!"

"If she is, we'll bust her."

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"Do we darst to fix the bell?"

"Course."

"What if they'd catch us?"

"They'd send us to the reform school. sure."

"Naw, they wouldn't. My father'd get us off."

"Pa'd lam me good, though."

"Naw, he wouldn't. Yer ma'd beg him off."

"We'll chanst it, anyway."

The boys made their way to the trapdoor and found it unlocked. They pushed it up and clambered into the little aërial chamber, latticed in from observation from the street, where the



bell hung like a great sleeping creature. The boys were awe-struck at its size and at the ponderous beams of wood that supported it. Spot began to get uneasy.

"Gosh! Let's not tie 'er. What if they should ring for a fire after we'd got her fixed?"

"We'd holler down to them to quit till we untied her."

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"Yes, and get lammed by the big policeman."

"No, we wouldn't. We'd sneak down between the plasterin' and they'd never find us."

"That's so — but — gol darn — I don't like it!"

"Aw, what you 'fraid of? Gorrry, but we ain't got any string!"

"Take your jacket."

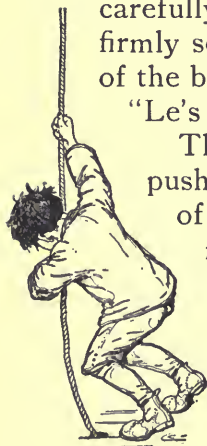
This suggestion was instantly acted upon. Spot slipped off his coat, and in a few moments it was wrapped around the tongue of the bell, and the sleeves tied carefully around one of the clappers, firmly securing the tongue to the side of the bell.

"Le's pull 'er up.

The boys stood on the wheel and pushed, but in vain. The great mass of metal would not move through more than a quarter of the circle at the best they could do.

"We'll have to go down into the attic an' ring her up."

"Gosh! I hope there won't be a fire!"



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Perspiring and excited, the boys slipped down through the trapdoor into the attic, where the bell rope ran through the floor into the vestibule below.

"Git hold of her, Shorty; hurry up!"

A creaking and groaning was heard above as the great bell answered to the first sturdy pulls on the rope.

"Ketch the back stroke," gasped Spot. "Lam it to 'er. Now, together!"

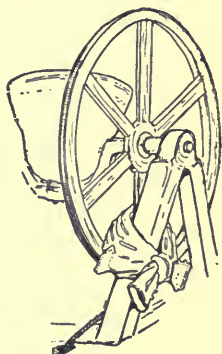
Shorty said nothing, but he panted and pulled till his eyes stood out like marbles and his breath came in quick gasps.

"Now be ready to catch 'er. She's almost up."

The rope slacked a bit, then began to run up a little faster. The bell was just over the center of gravity. Both boys grabbed the rope with desperation and held the bell in place.

"Bully! She's set! She's set! Now balance her."

The rope was pulled down just a trifle and seemed to stick. The boys let go of



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it carefully. They knew the great bell was poised in mid-air above them, and would stay there until blown or pulled over. They hurried up into the belfry, where they wrestled with the mighty problem of getting Spot's coat from the tongue.

"Take your jacket and tie the wheel, Shorty," said Spot.

This was no sooner said than done. Every moment was now precious, for something might happen at any time—something momentous and epochal. The wheel was secured, and Spot climbed onto the frame, leaned over the mouth of the great bell and undid the sleeves of his jacket from the clapper. The bell was free to speak again. The wheel was then released, and the bell was ready for business at the touch of the rope.

The boys were too excited to say a word. They made a plunge for the trapdoor, hurried down the stairs, and began to worm their way between the plastering and the wall in



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dead silence. It was too critical a time for speech.

They were soon on the ground, and the snake process of reaching the cellar window began. Shorty reached it first and was about to crawl out, when suddenly he drew back, bumping Spot's head with his feet and evoking much smothered protest from that excited person.

"Shut up! Durn, if there ain't——"

"Gosh! It ain't the police?"

"No; keep still; it's the sexton!"

The boys were as silent as specters, as that hard-working and little-appreciated gentleman walked by the window and into the church to give it the weekly sweeping and airing. They could hear his step over their heads in the vestibule. He walked by the bell rope without looking at it, unlocked the inner doors, and the boys heard him rummaging around inside.

"Say!"

"What?"

"We got ter move."

The desperadoes crawled out of the window and doubled over like Delawares

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on the trail. They fled around the corner of the church and down Chickabiddy Lane. They didn't stop to consult, but instinctively separated and made for their homes.



Away up in the air the conscious bell stood poised like Mercury on tiptoe, waiting to leap into the sky from some Grecian hilltop. The boys held another important secret locked in their breasts and they were miserably happy.

.
“Goodness gracious!” exclaimed Mrs. Hitchcock at supper time. “What on earth’s the matter with that boy?”

Shorty jumped with terror at the possibility of discovery.

“Ain’t nothin’,” he said indignantly. “What’s the matter?”

“What are you fidgeting around for and listening all the time? Where did you get all that mud and those cobwebs on you? Why don’t you eat



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your supper? I'll have to give you a dose of sas'prilla, I guess."

"I don't want no sas'prilla. I ain't hungry to-night."

"Well, you go out on the porch and brush yourself."

Shorty went out on the porch with the brush and was flapping it around in the useless and rebellious way in which boys brush their clothes, now and then looking through the trees where the Baptist steeple seemed to stand out as if the landscape had a sore thumb.

"Say, Shorty!"

It was Spot Maloney. He looked sneaking and apprehensive, and he stood half behind a tree, Indian fashion, to prevent the white scouts from General Braddock's army, who were everywhere around, from getting a shot at him.

"Been to supper?"

"Yep."

"Come out here a minnit."

Shorty laid the brush on the window sill, and dodged from tree to tree to avoid stray bullets.

"Say, she ain't gone off yet."

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‘Nop.’

“Do you know what night it is?”

“No.”

“It’s Wednesday! To-night’s prayer meetin’, an’ they toll the bell at quarter past seven!”

“Gosh! So ’tis.”

The boys had been counting on having the bell go off at nine o’clock when the policeman rang the curfew, but they had forgotten that it was meeting night, and that a noisy clamor at that time would be little short of scandalous.

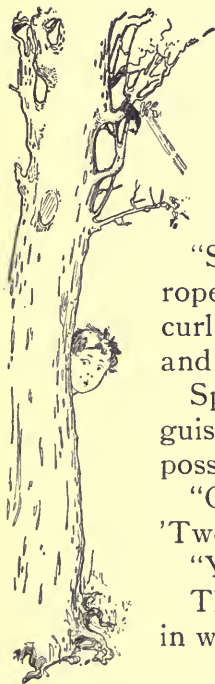
“Say, do you ’spose when the rope comes running down, it will curl ’round old Bill Kendall’s neck and jerk him up to the ceilin’?”

Spot looked the picture of anguish as he suggested this awful possibility of injury to the sexton.

“Gorry! I never thought of that. ’Twould break his durn old neck.”

“You bet it would!”

The boys looked at each other in wild surmise.



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"What would they do to us?"

"It would be murder, wouldn't it?"

"Say, we better go down an' tell 'im."

"P'raps 'twouldn't be murder if we didn't go to do it."

"Let's try and see what we better do."

Spot Maloney held out the back of his hand and carefully spit on it. Then with the forefinger of the other hand, he struck a quick blow. The omen flew in a direction away from the church, and the boys were much relieved.

"It says, 'Keep away from the church,'" said Shorty. "I guess we'll chanst it."

"Let's go up on top of the barn and hear her go off."

The boys scrambled up on the hen-house and climbed the side of the barn roof, pulling themselves up by the shingles where they projected over the edge.

Seated astride the ridgepole they had a good view of the town with its steeples and roofs. The sun was setting, and the



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western heavens were a blaze of light. People were walking down the street after supper to see the train come in. Some of the boys were playing a vociferous game of baseball over on the muster field.

In the quiet the bell of the Congregational church began to toll clear and sweet for prayer meeting. Immediately the Methodist bell took up the strain.

"Say, why don't she go? S'pose he is on?"

The boys were becoming apprehensive. Suddenly——

Boom!!—Boom!!—Bangerty bang!!—
Boom! Boom!! Boomerty Boom!!
Bangerty Bang-er-ty—Boom!! Boom—
boom — boom — boom — boom — boom—
boom — boom — boom ——

"Say, warn't that great! He's got her stopped, you see, and is tolling her. That shows it didn't break his neck."

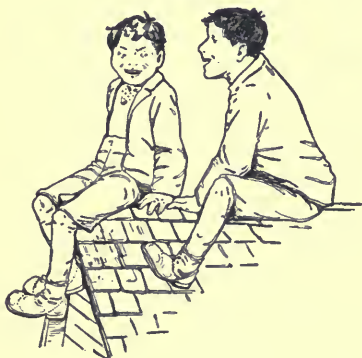
"You bet! Wasn't that bully!"

The boys climbed down the barn chuckling and punching each other and trying to see which one could knock the other off and break his leg or arm. Failing of this innocent enjoyment, they made their

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way over to the muster field and were soon working their way to the bat, in a hot game of scrub.

Meanwhile, Bill Kendall, the sexton, tolled away at the bell, grumbling to himself.



CHAPTER V

In Which It Becomes Necessary to Found the "Patriots' Defense Society."



"WHATCHEER grinnin' at?"
"Nothin'."

Shorty sat on the green-sward in front of Peewee Jackson's house, whittling out a wooden tomahawk. Peewee was standing inside the fence that surrounded the yard, eating an apple and smiling provokingly.

"Whatcher grinnin' at?"

"Nothin'."

"Then you better saw off."

"Guess I've got a license to grin."

"Show it up."

"Don't hafter."

"Oh, don't?"

"No."

"If you know anything worth grinnin' at, you better let her out."

"I don't tell all I know till the time comes."

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Shorty stopped work and looked in suspicion at Peewee, who continued to eat his apple with every appearance of great good nature. This fact was in itself suspicious. As a general thing Peewee was glum.

"Yes'm."

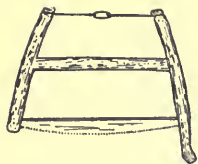
Some one from the house called Peewee, and as he went in he turned toward Shorty, wagged his hand knowingly and remarked:

"I'm onto you fellers. Tellin' about me cuttin' the hose! There's worse things than cuttin' the hose, an' I never did it neither, by gosh!"

Peewee disappeared into the house, leaving Shorty in a cold perspiration. How far did Peewee's dangerous knowledge extend? Could he have found the pencils in the haymow? Shorty made a bee line for home, and looking around and seeing that he was unobserved, he entered the barn and reached his hand under one corner of the mow.



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He heaved a sigh of relief when he found that the pencils were safe in their place. He must find Spot.

Spot was doing a little something in wood in connection with a buck saw, and he was doing it with very bad grace. That he kept at work at all was due to the presence of Mrs. Maloney at the kitchen window. When he faltered, which was often, she held him to the work by the force of mind.

"I've got to saw and split ten sticks before I get loose," said Spot disconsolately.

"Let's push her right through," said Shorty. "I've got something to tell you. Pick out ten small ones."

"The small ones was all picked out yesterday," said Spot. "Those there is the smallest they is."

"Chuck one of 'm on the buck," said Shorty, "and I'll try it. We'll take turn on and turn off. Any man that stops before he saws her through is poisoned."



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Under this stimulus the ten sticks were soon eaten up, and the boys, after drinking a quart of water, went out behind the barn. Here Shorty outlined his conversation with Peewee and found Spot properly harrowed in soul by the revelation.

"My gosh! It looks as though he'd got us. What are we goin' to do?"

"Oh, we ain't goin' to give up. We kin sarcumvent him yet."

Shorty had been faithfully reading the Deerslayer stories and often fell into the Natty Bumpoo dialect.

"Besides, we don't know that he knows anything about—them!"

Shorty pointed knowingly to the barn where the pencils lay hidden.

"Say, I'll tell you what let's do. We ought never to say 'pencils.'" Spot whispered the word. "When we talk about them let's hold up four fingers, like that. That's our secret sign."

"Bully good!"

"Say, it's great!"

"Why not get up a secret society with pass words and signs and call it the 'Patriots' Defense Society'?" asked Shorty.

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"Why 'patriots'?" asked Spot.

"Because we ain't done nothin'. We never stole the——"



At the missing word Shorty held up four fingers. The boys were delighted with the scheme. No detective could ever penetrate such a brilliant disguise of the facts.

"Say, we've got to take in Slim Jones. He is in on the deal and knows about the ——" (Four fingers again.)

"Of course. He's in it as bad as we are."

"Say, on the way over let's go in and look at Balmy Wilson's red herring's egg."

When there was an opportunity the boys always stopped to look at this curiosity. No other boy in town had a heron's egg, and this one was priceless.

"Balmy never found that egg himself!"

"Naw! Red herring's don't lay near this town. Balmy's cousin in Michigan sent it to him."

"How do you know? Balmy let on to me that he found her out to the bog."

"He never! Old Wilson told my father that it came in the post office, wrapped up in cotton batting."

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"That so? It's an awful scarce egg."

"My hen hawk's egg's scarce, too."

"'Tain't so scarce as a red herring's."

"Oh, I dunno."

"How did you find her?"

"Slim Jones found the nest in a great big pine tree. He couldn't shin her."



"Did he tell you?"

"Yep. He said if I could shin her, I could have first pick."

"Was it a tough shin?"

"You bet ye! The nest was made of sticks an' there was two eggs in her and a little hen hawk."

"A little hen hawk is a chicken hawk, ain't it?"

"I dunno. P'raps."

"Did you kill the young one?"

"No, I divvied with the birds. I took the eggs an' they took the young one. One of the eggs was picked."



"Did you give Slim Jones the picked egg?"

"You bet! 'Twas my first choice. His picked egg hatched that night in his

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c'llection and the chicken broke his fly-catcher's egg."

"Thunder!"

"Yes. He killed it."

"How many eggs has Slim got?"

"He's got twenty-three. I've got thirty-two."

By this time the boys had reached Balmy Wilson's house, and Shorty whistled on his fingers like a circular saw striking a pine knot.

No one knew why Henry Wilson was called Balmy. The name sprang up spontaneously, and no one thought of calling him anything else.

"Say, Balmy, let's see yer red her-ring's egg."

"All right!"

The boy was immensely flattered by the attention paid to his prize and he hurried in to procure it.

"Ain't she a beute!"

"You bet!"

"Say, Balmy, I'll give yer my hen hawk's egg, two peewee eggs, and a flycatcher's for her."



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"Naw! That egg's wuth most a hundred dollars. They're awful scarce."

"They are *pretty* scarce."

"I'll throw in my pearl-handled knife and a ball of fish line."

"Naw, I won't trade. Red herrings' eggs is scarce."

The egg passed carefully from hand to hand.

"She ain't been blowed."

"No. I didn't dast to pick her. Afraid she'd bust."

"When they ain't blowed they bust on yer sometimes."

"I guess she won't bust."

"P'raps not."

"I had a flycatcher's egg bust in my mouth once."

The boys often carried eggs in their mouths to protect the thin shells, and this catastrophe was not an uncommon one.

"How did she taste?"

"Awful! I chewed grass and leaves to get the taste out. I guess the egg was a bad one."

"Well, come on, Spot; let's go on Good-by, Balmy!"

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"Good-by!"

Slim was up in his barn chamber making a squirrel trap, but he knocked off work when the boys appeared.

"Say, fellers, if you will keep shut up, I'll show you something."

"What is it?"

"Promise not ter tell?"

"Black and blue!"

Slim led the way to the haymow.

"Yer won't give it away?"

"No, honest."

The fat boy thrust his hand into the mow on the side of the barn and produced a mysterious bottle.

"What's in that?"

"I dunno. Pa had some of it in the cellar and I swiped one bottle last night and hid her."

"Let's taste her."

"I'll give you a swig if you won't tell."

"All right. Honest Injun! Hope ter die!"

Slim made another dive into the hay and produced the half of a cocoanut shell with a hole in it. He handed it to Shorty.



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"Put your finger over the hole."

Shorty did so, and Slim poured out a few drops of the liquid, which Shorty disposed of in a gulp.

"That's bully!"

"You bet!"

The other boys all had a sample, Slim taking a double allowance for himself.

"What do you call her?"

"I dunno. It sounds something like that new sickness."

Shorty tried to pronounce cerebrospinal meningitis, which was at that time just coming into popular notice.

"That's it, only it isn't. I can't call it."

After this the drink was always referred to as "c'rebro." I have never been able to ascertain what it was, though I suspect that it may have been raspberry shrub.

"Say, Slim, want to join the Patriots' Defense Society?"

"Naw! What is it?"

"Well, we are afraid Peewee Jackson knows about the ——" (four fingers again), "and we are going to sarcumvent him."

"What's that four fingers?"



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"You tell him, Spot."

Spot took Slim carefully aside and imparted the secret in a whisper. When Slim finally caught the idea, he liked it. It held in it the mystery and secrecy so dear to the boy heart.



"I'll be president of the society," said Henry, "and we'll have a new president every week so as to throw the detectives off the scent."

"Let's have some more signs," suggested Slim.

"What's signs?"

"Why, like the four fingers. When we want to give warning, we'll hold one finger on each hand up in the air at arm's length, like this. That will mean, 'Patriots, beware!' "

"Good enough!" said Shorty. "And fingers on one hand crossed means, 'Let the spy die.' Fingers on two hands crossed means, 'Run for your life. Danger!' "



A number of other signs were agreed on, and the boys, finding too much exer-

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cise on the idea wearing to their minds, started off to go in swimming. They made their way to the river, stopping by the way to pull a few bricks out of a loose corner of the schoolhouse, to stone the hornets; and to peer into a robin's nest to see if the eggs had hatched. As soon as they came into view of the river behind the small soap factory, they began to disrobe on the run.

"Last one in has got to shin a tree backward! No lubber on the one that said it!"

Shinning a tree backward was the penalty always exacted from the last boy to get into the water, and Slim Jones, because of his avoirdupois, was usually the victim. There was, however, one remedy. By crying out, "Lubber on the one who said it!" the penalty was transferred to the boy who raised the cry; but if he first cried, "No lubber on the one who said it!" the danger was averted.

The glorious picture made by Slim Jones vainly trying to climb a tree head downward, called out wild yells of encouragement that attracted the



Stony Lonesome



workmen in the factory to the windows.

While Slim was trying to perform his impossible feat, the other boys tied his shirt into a hard knot, which they secured by wetting it. Spot also placed a heavy stone on Slim's straw hat. Such tricks as these represent a boy's idea of humor.

The gang dived, swam under water, tried "to fetch bottom," sat in a row on the wharf, and fought and lied and told the usual boy legends; then they jumped into the water again and staid until their lips were blue, and so on for the rest of the long summer afternoon till the whistles blew for six o'clock and supper. This meant a rapid dressing and a scurrying for home, with Slim Jones left alone on the wharf to get the knot out of his shirt.

As Shorty disappeared in the distance, he gave Slim the sign of the double crossed fingers that meant, "Run for your life. Danger!"

"I never seen a meaner gang'n that," thought the fat boy to himself



Stony Lonesome

as he tugged at the knots. "An' right after I treated them to my c'rebro, too. I see me givin' up any more of it. I'm too easy. And joined their measly old society, too. I'll fix 'em. Darn, if I ain't a good mind to tell about them pencils. If they warn't in my haymow, too, I would. But shucks! I'd go to jail with the rest of 'em."

Slim finally undid the knots, got his shirt on backwards, and ambled across the fields for home, meditating other plans of vengeance less dangerous to himself.

Spot and Shorty on their way home had also been laying plans.

"Say, Shorty, let's go up to-night and get Slim's bottle of c'rebro!"

"Good! Let's do it. We'll meet right after supper."

After Slim Jones had disappeared up the bank and down the path, a small figure slipped out of the factory and made its way towards the town. It wore a smile on its face, a smile of half-concealed triumph. It was Peewee Jackson, the Boy Detective!

CHAPTER VI

In Which the Treacherous Raid on Slim Jones' Private Stock Comes to Naught.

SLIM JONES was late to supper that night, but he had a few plans of vengeance in mind that would be likely to take form in the future.



The other boys swallowed their food as hastily as possible so as not to miss the evening's entertainment. Shorty and Spot appeared on the street almost simultaneously. They had their bean blowers in their pockets and began picking off their foes. Stray cats and dogs or little girls and boys were their legitimate prey.

"Haven't seen the cops yet, have you?"

"No, but the paper said there was a New York detective stopping at the hotel. I took my pencils out of the haymow and buried them in the back yard."

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"My gracious! A detective!"

"Yes."

"Say, we're up! It's no use."

"P'raps he wasn't on our case."

"I believe we're gonners! Let's run away!"

"O—o, look at that!"

Five or six little girls were on the steps of the church playing "Raw-Head-and-Bloody-Bones." This play simply represents the enjoyment of the ecstasy of protection in the sight of the Fearful Object. The dramatis personae are the Mother Girl with her Children, and the Ogre or Giant known as Raw-Head-and-Bloody-Bones. One of the larger girls takes this part. She hides around a corner or under a flight of steps, while the little girls play innocently near the mother. The sudden appearance of the ogre results in great screaming and running to the mother, all the girls hanging passionately to her skirts for the sense of protection so dear to the child heart.

Spot and Shorty forgot their desperate situation in the joy of the chase. They filled their mouths with beans and crawled

Stony Lonesome

along a fence until they were within range.



"Let's pepper the Ror-Head!"
"All right."

The ogre was astonished by the sudden fall of mysterious beans about her person.

"Henry Hitchcock, you stop that!"

The secret was out, and the boys fled up the street, hooting and laughing. This incident occurred after supper, while the summer sun was still high. The boys were waiting for nightfall to make their projected raid on Slim Jones' hidden stores. Several dogs, wandering around looking for bones or engaged in social duties, were astonished by well-directed shots and fled up the street or into their yards with sharp yelps.

A respectable farmer coming into town behind the family horse was a godsend.

"Hi, there!"

The farmer looked over his shoulder.



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"Say, your wheel's goin' round!"

The farmer made no reply but drove on.

"Say, your hoss is movin'!"

This was from Shorty, but Spot was not far behind.



"Push on his tail feathers an' he'll go faster."

The farmer was evidently annoyed. The boys began to blow beans at him, and to cry, "Caw, caw, caw," to indicate that the crows were after the horse's remains.

"Better not take that old crow-bait down town. They'll arrest you!"

The farmer grabbed his whip and jumped from the wagon. The effect was magical. Shorty and Spot fell over the first fence like two frightened cats, dodged around a house and through an alley, across a street, and were well into another section of town before they stopped to look around.

"Say, he was mad!"

Stony Lonesome

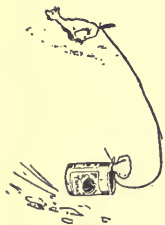
"If he'd caught us, he'd licked us good."

"He didn't catch us."

"Let's separate and meet back of Slim's barn. If we're seen goin' up together, they'll be on to us."

"All right."

Shorty ran around one way, and Spot disappeared in the other through the growing darkness. Shorty had barely reached the end of the block when a heavy hand was laid on his collar. His heart fell about twenty feet. The police had him at last! It was all over.



"Lemme be! Whatcher tryin' to do?"

"I saw you and Spot Maloney firing stones at my dog last week." It was only Breezy Martin, a big lout of a fellow and a general ne'er-do-weel who owned a thin-skinned dog of which he was very choice.

"I never did it. It was Spot."

"Huh! I caught Spot last week and he said it was you."

"I never!"

Stony Lonesome

"Well, I'm goin' to knock the stuffin' out o' yer!"

Shorty bit and kicked vigorously, but Breezy Martin cuffed him severely and kicked him aside.

"There, you'll let my dog alone after this!"

Shorty was sniffing with rage.

"Gol darn you! I'll get even with you! I'll poison your dog!"

Breezy started to repeat the punishment, but Shorty fled. Later he met Spot back of the Jones barn, sitting under a tree and whittling a shingle.

"Say, Breezy Martin lammed me."

"He lammed me the other day, too."

"You told on me."

"I never!"

"You did, too! He said you did!"

"Well, he's a liar!"

There was further exchange of compliments, but the incident finally passed without overt act.

"How we goin' to git Slim's licker?"

"Can't we git in the barn winder?"

"It's too high."



Stony Lonesome

"Let's get a pole an' shin up."

"P'raps the winder's locked."

"That's so."

"We'll sneak in the barn door an' up the stairs."



The boys sat around and waited until a lamp was lighted in the Jones house. Then they stole around the corner of the barn like ghosts, slipped in at the door and scurried up the stairs.

"What's that?"

No sound was heard but that of the horses chewing their hay and stamping to scatter the flies.

"If Slim's father catches us, he'll fan us with a board."

"Whaffor? We'd tell him we're come to see Slim."

"That's so."

"Go ahead!"

"Here's the place!"

Shorty reached his hand into the hole.

"Gol darn! She ain't here."

Slim, the wily, the suspicious one, had feared something of this kind and had

Stony Lonesome

changed the hiding place of his treasured bottle.

The boys made their way home dejectedly, keeping a close watch out for police and detectives. The darkness seemed to be full of metal stars and clubs, and they would hardly have been surprised at any moment to have heard the fateful words, "You are my prisoners!"



As the boys moved cautiously along the sidewalk, they saw Mrs. Mason, a widow of small but independent fortune, sitting comfortably at her dining-room window, knitting. From time to time she counted her stitches, glanced up at the clock, and sniffed vigorously. Shorty used to carry milk for Mrs. Mason. She lived all by herself on Lilac street, and took a pint of milk which some of the boys brought to her door every evening. This milk she carefully set in a little tin pan in the buttery and skimmed for her morning cup of coffee.



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When Shorty sometimes forgot to take her the milk because of the strenuousness of boy life, Mrs. Mason's remarks about little boys were far from complimentary. In the course of a season of arduous milk



Mason and her ways. One day, in a desire to confide in somebody, if only a boy—for life in the large house was very lonesome—Mrs. Mason took him into the cellar

and showed him rows on rows of kindling wood, all carefully cut into exact lengths and piled with geometrical precision to the very top of the cellar. The wood

ran several times the length of the cellar, and ought, at the least calculation, to have lasted for years.

"I've been using on it for two years and eight months now," said Mrs. Mason, with a sigh, "and it looks to me as if it would last as long as I do. I ain't very long for this world now."

"Where'd you get it all, Mrs. Mason?" he asked, more for the sake of making

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talk and being polite than because he cared to know.

"Well, you see, Mr. Mason, when he was alive, knew that he had got to die with his complaint, and he knew that I would be left all alone here to take care of myself. He always made all the fires, and he didn't like to think of me a-making them; he was so thoughtful. So one day he began to split kindling wood and pile it in the cellar for me to use after he was gone. As long as he lived, which was for two years after that, he kept working on these piles of wood, and one of the last things he did before he took to his bed was to split a few pieces and lay them. Those are the pieces there, the last he split. I couldn't bear to use them, so I laid them to one side to kind of remind me. Though, of course, I am reminded of him every time I build a kitchen fire, anyhow."

This pathetic incident of love that survived the grave did not have much influence on Shorty's feelings.

"Say, let's put a tick-tack on her winder."

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"Got any strings?"

Shorty fished out of his pocket about ten yards of fish line.

"Here's a nail."

The satanic contrivance was quickly arranged, and Shorty sneaked up under the window and pinned it to the sash. The boys hid behind the lilac bush by the fence. Shorty pulled the string.

Tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick---

Mrs. Mason jumped to her feet.

The boys chuckled with joy and the ticking stopped.

Mrs. Mason looked all around and then resumed her knitting.

Tick-tick-tick-tick---

This time she came to the window and, peering out, caught the nail in the act. She rushed for the door, grabbing a broom in her passage; but Spot and Shorty were flying down the street.

The evening was not entirely a failure. Neither was the evening one devoid of action on the part of Terrible Peewee, the Bold Boy



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Never-sleep. With joy too deep for expression, he had seen the punishment administered to Shorty by Breezy Martin and had afterwards followed him at a long distance to his rendezvous. But what did the secret raid on Slim Jones' barn mean? Was not Slim in the conspiracy? Sure he was! He had been with the boys in the cave. Aha! A great light suddenly dawned on the boy detective! He saw it all! The other boys were playing Slim false. They were trying to steal his share of the plunder. Such treachery was like Shorty Hitchcock. It was his nature. Peewee laughed a noiseless laugh.

"I'll foil the whole nest of villains yet. Justice shall be done."

CHAPTER VII

In Which Peewee and "the Police" Break Up a Secret Meeting of the Patriots' Defense Society.

WHEN Shorty played "short" on the Red Stockings he found nothing to do except to crane his neck and to watch the "high flies" chasing one another overhead. The trouble with the Red Stockings Baseball Club was that the members of the nine were theorists. The art of pitching had just developed from the simple tossed ball to the "round arm" and then to "the underhand throw," and every boy in the nine was full of ideas and experiments and was nearly crazy with interest and excitement over the game. While every boy jack was trying to put these theories into practice, the coarse, rough boys who played ball on the other nines smote the leathern sphere heavily and wore themselves out



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running around the bases for scores. The Red Stockings' out-fielders never caught anything, unless it was the mumps. They had theories as to how a high ball should be "judged." These theories worked out well in the conversations back of the barn, but they failed in the field. As an example of what is meant by theories, let me relate the case of Noony Norris, the crack pitcher of the Red Stockings. The boys all knew that, from his cradle, Nuisance or "Noony" Norris was cut out for a great pitcher. Noony knew it too.



There were fights over the other positions, but everybody conceded that Noony should pitch. No one could tell where his reputation had been made, but nobody questioned it. He was conceded to be the wildest little scoundrel that ever twirled leather. I wonder why we were all so sure of his ability to twist the ball so that it would just roll around the bat of his astonished victim?



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When the game began, Noony took the sphere and struck his professional attitude. After that the catcher of the Red Stockings "kicked" because he hadn't anything to do. Every ball that was tossed, a "giant" from the other nine lifted into the next pasture. It was pitiful.



In the first game played, after the Red Stockings had been used to dent the pasture and after the score stood 114 to 28, Spot Maloney remarked to the boys:

"Say, I don't believe Noony's no good to pitch."

That was the end of Noony's reputation. The club was ripe for the doubt. Noony was unanimously thrown out. But the nine never won anything after that, either.



After the first of these disgraceful performances on the diamond, Shorty, Spot, and Slim Jones had wandered out behind

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the Hitchcock barn to talk it over and to abuse Noony Norris for not having put a foundation under his reputation.

"He didn't show no headwork," complained Shorty. "The ball just went easy right over the base and they pasted it."

"If it hadn't been for Noony we might have walloped 'em," said Slim Jones.

"Noony lost us that game, sure," assented Spot. "I saw after the first innings that we might as well have been settin' down. We'll never hear the last of that."

"Well, I don't care," said Shorty, "as long's the detectives don't round us up. Say, let's show Slim the cave in under the church and hold a meeting of the Patriots' Defense Society in it."

"Good!" said Spot.

"Hold on," said Slim suspiciously. "What's this about caves? I've got enough o' caves an' of shirt-tyin', too. I call that pretty low down to use a brother patriot that way, by gosh!"

"Oh, that's only in fun, Slim," explained Shorty. "We didn't mean nothin' by it."



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"Well, I say gol darn such fun as that. What church is she under?"

"The cave? Oh, the Baptist. Me an' Spot found her one day when we fixed the bell. Say, wasn't that great!"

The thought was so full of joy that Spot could not find words to express it. The boys wandered over to the church, and after some discussion crawled in at the window. Slim was the last to enter. His mind was filled with doubt and forebodings as he noticed the small space between the floor of the church and the ground. Complaining of the heat and of the narrow space, he wiggled along behind the boys. Hardly had Slim's fat little stockings worked their way into the aperture when Peewee Jackson, the Boy Detective, crept around the corner of the church and stole over to the window.

"Wonder what they're up to?"

Peewee did not dare follow the boys, but he sat down near the window and tried to hear what they were saying.

"By gum!" said Slim breathlessly, "I'm going to back out. I'll get stuck in this."

"She widens up in here, Slim," said

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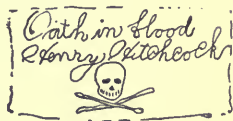
Shorty. "Just push under that beam. There!"

Slim came out near the wall where space was a little more free and looked around with much interest.

"There's where we climb up to get at the bell," said Spot. "See them cleats nailed on?"

"Now," said Shorty, "let the Patriot's Defense Society come to order and we'll consider the ——" Shorty held up four fingers.

"Say," said Spot, "I move first we take an oath in blood to shut up and say nothin' till the time comes."



"What's an oath in blood?" asked Slim uneasily.

"Why, you cut your finger and sign the agreement in your own blood and then you can't break it, you know."

"Why can't you?"

"Why, because! They never do, the pirates and buccaneers. Thunder! Do you suppose a pirate'd break a blood oath? No sir!"

"Well, perhaps not."

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"Of course not."

"But who's going to cut his finger to get the blood?" asked Shorty.

"Oh, Slim'll do that," said Spot. "We'll take a nail, dip it in the blood and make a cross on the wall here."

"Well, I guess not!"

"Oh, come on!"

"Well, I guess not! You cut your own finger."

"What's that!"

A noise like some one scraping on the floor was heard overhead. Then all was still.

"Say, what was that?" said Slim.

"Shut up," whispered Spot; "they's detectives in the entry."

"Let's crawl out and cut," whispered Shorty.

At this point heavy steps were heard above, followed by a kicking and scrambling noise, and a childish voice was raised in protest.

"My gosh! That's Peewee Jackson," said Shorty. "Come and let's move out."

Peewee, the wily Never-sleep, finding

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that he could not hear the boys' conversation from the window in the foundation, had stealthily made his way to the entry way of the church. He was lying on the floor with his ear at a crack when Bill Kendall, the sexton, happening to come in, discovered him in this suspicious attitude and caught him by the coat collar.



"You lemme go!"

"What are you doing in here?"

"Nothin'!"

"Then you'll go to jail."

"Whaffor?"

"Nothin'."

"They don't put boys in jail for nothin'."

"How do I know but what you was setting the church on fire?"

"I wasn't!"

"I don't know that."

"There's a gang under the floor and I was tryin' to hear what they said."

"A gang!"



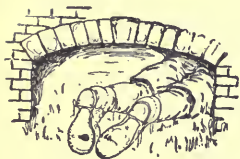
Stony Lonesome

"Yes, Shorty Hitchcock's."

"How'd they get under there?"

"By the winder."

"Well, we'll go out and look into this window."



Bill Kendall and Peewee Jackson reached the window just as the lower half of Shorty's form was appearing in view.

With a smile of triumph, Bill Kendall watched him back out. Shorty looked very sheepish.

"Come on out, boys; he's got us."

The boys wiggled out, Slim bringing up the rear. They were a dusty and muddy set. Bill Kendall's grin was changed suddenly into a disgusted look.

"Where's that little devil!"

During the excitement of the boys' exit, Peewee Jackson, the Bold Boy Sleuth, had "cut and run." He was nowhere to be seen.

"Oh, all right, let him run. I know him. What are you boys doing in there?"

"Nothin'. Just crawled in," said Shorty. "We warn't doing no hurt."

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"What's in under there?"

"Nothing but a hole. We were going to play cave an' Indians."

"Oh, you was!"

"Yes, honest."

"Then what was Peewee Jackson laying on the floor for an' listening at that crack?"

The boys looked at one another in dismay.

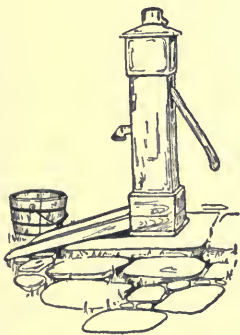
"We didn't know he was there. He was just spyin' on us."

"Well, if I catch you around this church again, I'll slap the whole outfit in jail. Somebody fooled with this bell the other day. I know you boys warn't big enough

to do that, but anybody we catch around here after this will get into the lockup. You hear me?"

The boys went off together to have a drink at the old pump in the town square before returning home.

"Say," said Shorty, "he



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come just in time to stop Peewee from hearin' us. Wasn't that luck?"

"Wonder how much Peewee heard anyway."

"He didn't hear a thing. We used the signal."

"Wasn't that great?"

"You bet!"

"But he suspects something."

"How'd you know?"

"What's he spyin' on us for?"

"Oh, just because he's Peewee. It's the detectives I'm afraid of."

The boys were somewhat worried by this adventure, but they finally concluded that Peewee did not know anything and was of too small consequence to notice further than to lick for spying if they should catch him. But that night before he went to bed, Peewee, the Boy Never-sleep, cut another deep notch in the handle of his tomahawk.

CHAPTER VIII

In Which Peewee Jackson, the Boy Detective, Finds a Clue as Big as a House.

SHORTY HITCHCOCK'S first trouble on the Sabbath was that he seemed to be wide awake in the morning, when other people wanted to sleep. Usually it was the labor of Hercules to get the boy awake and out of bed; something at which Mrs. Hitchcock threw up her hands and which brought out the full glory of Mr. Hitchcock's dominance in the family. But on Sunday, and especially on this Sunday, it was another story. The town was deadly still, and Shorty had been aroused to complete wakefulness by the thought that the police might choose this day to show their hands. Nothing could be heard but the noise of the hens busying themselves in the egg industry, and the stamping of the horse in his eternal fight with flies in the barn.



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The sun seemed to come up earlier and to shine brighter than usual. Shorty tried desperately to sleep, but it was useless. He jumped out of bed and began to dress himself to the accompaniment of a shrill whistle.



"Henry!"

"What?"

"If you are going to get up, you must keep still."

There it was. What was the use of living, anyway?

Shorty loafed around looking over his birds' eggs and postage stamps, teasing the cat and feeding the hens, until the long morning wore itself away and breakfast was prepared.

At the table everybody sat very still while Mr. Hitchcock bowed his head and said:

"For what we are about to receive, may we be truly thankful."

After the breakfast Mr. Hitchcock drew his chair from the table and Minnie handed him the Bible. A chapter was read and the family knelt at the chairs

Stony Lonesome

while a prayer was offered. Mr. Hitchcock to-day read the chapter, taken at random, where man is compared to a shadow, and in his prayer he dwelt at length on this simile. Shorty for a wonder had been listening. As they arose, he broke out:

"Pa!"

"Well?"

"Did it say man was a shadow?"

"Yes, my son, his life is like a shadow."

"Is a boy a shadow, too?"

"Yes, life is very uncertain."

"Say."

"Well?"

"Slim Jones ain't no shadow."

"Henry, leave the room!"

There it was once more. A boy had no show, especially on Sunday.

The sight of the hens in the yard, still engaged in getting their breakfast, offered a little diversion. Shorty procured a handful of corn and threw it out one grain at a time to see them scramble



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for it. He grew indignant at the old one-eyed rooster who clucked so vigorously to call the hens and then ate the corn himself.

"I'll fix him!" said Shorty to himself.

He whipped out his knife and began boring a hole in a kernel of corn.

"Henry!"

"What?"

"I want you to say, 'What, *sir*.'"

"All right."

"What are you doing?"

"Nothing, only feeding the hens a little corn."

"Are you ready for church?"

"Yes, *sir*."

Shorty bored a hole through the corn and attached a string to it. This he threw out, keeping hold of one end of the string. The one-eyed rooster fell heavily upon the corn without investigation and swallowed it. Shorty gave a vigorous pull at the string, and the astonished rooster lost the corn and set up a loud and indignant cackle.



"Henry!"

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"What, sir?"

"What are you doing to the rooster?"

"Nothing."

"Well, I don't want you to frighten the fowls."

"No, sir."

At this point Minnie Hitchcock, aged sixteen, came out, and Shorty in great glee told her of the rooster's mishap.

"Why, Henry Hitchcock! Aren't you awful!"

"Naw! 'Twasn't nothin'."

"What do you suppose the rooster thought?"

"I dunno. He looked awful surprised."

"Did you ever notice how hard they peck at the Indian meal mush ma makes for them?"

"Sure! They're always hungry. Say!"

"What?"

Another idea was taking shape in Shorty's brain.

"You go in and get Injun meal and we'll fool 'em."

"How?"



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"Never you mind. You get the meal and you'll see."

Minnie's curiosity was aroused and she procured the meal. Shorty filled a tin basin with water. On this he sprinkled the meal until the water was completely covered. This dish he placed in the yard, crying vigorously as he did so:

"Biddy, biddy, biddy, biddy! Chick, chick, chick, chick!"



The hens came flying from all quarters and as they saw the dish of Indian meal, they pecked vigorously at it only to dash their heads deep into the water.

Shorty howled with laughter and Minnie, suspecting trouble, ran into the house. While Shorty was enjoying the scene, his father walked sternly out of the house, and before Shorty knew what had happened, he went through the operation of having his ear "twigged."

"Ouch!"

"Don't you move out of this house until it is time for church."

Shorty, with rebellion in his heart, went into the sitting room and looked over

. Stony Lonesome

The Arabian Nights, Swiss Family Robinson, The Last of the Mohicans, and A Gold Hunter's Adventures in Australia,—an especial joy at this time.

"Pa!"

"Well?"

"I'm going down to church to see Bill Kendall ring the bell."

"Very well."

At the church door he met Spot Maloney, Slim Jones, Noony Norris, and some of the other boys who were there carefully disguised in their Sunday clothes. They had come early for a similar purpose.

Bill Kendall, the sexton, "rang her up," as setting the bell was called, and some of the more expert boys had the exquisite privilege of ringing her for a few minutes.

After the ringing was over and the tolling began, the boys went aside by themselves and discussed the Sunday school concert. Their class was going to take part. They were to arise at a particular point in the exercises and repeat



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a verse. By the snickering it was evident that they were planning some deviltry. But the church services interrupted further scheming.



As the bell tolled, the people began to come in with their faces set in a fixed way that indicated propriety. The sermon, however bright and short, was to the boys long and dry, but like all other mortal things, it had an end. Then came the Sunday school and after that, the dinner.

In some way or other, Shorty could never tell how, the long and dreary afternoon wore away and it was time to go to the Sunday school concert. Here the minister spoke rather pleasantly to the children, and the superintendent worried them with a few remarks. There was singing and then recitations by the brighter boys and girls.

Then came the *pièce de resistance* of the evening—the recitation by classes. Shorty's class was made up of seven graceless little toughs, himself and Spot Maloney, Speck Jordan, Slim Jones,

Stony Lonesome

Noony Norris, Pussy Clement, Bill Grimes—who could chew tobacco—and Frankie Foster, the good boy.



Shorty's class had the first clause to recite. They were to arise and cry, "Ho, every one that thirsteth." Then another class was to get up and proclaim, "Come ye to the waters." The plan was really quite admirable. At the signal the boys arose and impatiently announced:

"Thirst, every one that hoeth!"

Shorty and Spot were preternaturally solemn, but Slim Jones grinned. There was smothered laughter in the audience, and the superintendent expressed surprise and sorrow.

When the family reached home at nine o'clock, Shorty's father was very sober. Presently Shorty accompanied the author of his being to the woodshed, and the sounds that came thence indicated that Shorty had gone against the trunk strap.

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This day, so memorable for Shorty, had not been uneventful for Peewee Jackson. The Red Avenger's parents did not consider it necessary for him to go to church, and he had laid out a plan of action that included a careful search of the Hitchcock barn. To accomplish this object it was necessary to wait until the family



had left the house and until the neighborhood had quieted down. When the church bells had done ringing, Peewee scouted up the street and carefully surveyed the Hitchcock premises. Everything was quiet. Whistling as he went, the Red Avenger, with his hands behind him, strolled carelessly up the walk. Nobody in sight!

The Boy Detective stepped into the barn and was lost to view from the street. Once inside this building, Peewee's demeanor changed. The careless observer was laid off and the shrewd detective, hot on the trail, appeared. Peewee dug frantically into the haymow, felt along the beams, tried the loose boards in the floor and even poked into the grain box.

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Nothing.

"Foiled again."

The Avenger finally ceased his search and sat down on the ladder leading to the haymow to rest and think.

"Wonder if he hain't buried it over in the corner of the yard where he buried the cent. I'll risk her."

Peewee carelessly strolled out into the yard again and walked over to Shorty's favorite corner. Ha, the ground had been disturbed! Peewee looked all around. No one in sight! He dug his heel into the earth and pushed aside the loose sod and then dug with his hands.

Victory! The box was quickly brought to view, and Peewee with triumph in his heart was gazing at the mysterious pencils.

"I'll put 'em right back after taking two for evverdunce," said the wily one. "I'll get this gang where I want um!"

Peewee pocketed the pencils, replaced the box in the earth, covered it carefully and strolled out of the Hitchcock yard, whistling carelessly.

"As neat a piece of detective work as I ever done in my whole career!" thought

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the Boy Avenger as he made his way up the street.

But Peewee's villainy was not entirely without counteracting circumstances. After the Hitchcock family had retired and when the house had quieted down, Shorty slipped from his room into the yard and dug up the pencils. He had felt a nervous fear once or twice during the day that all was not well. The leering face of Peewee Jackson had been before his eyes and he wondered how much that youthful sleuth really knew. Shorty had counted the pencils probably a hundred times and knew that there were exactly eighteen of them. When he hastily ran them over at this time he found two missing! With fear tugging at his heart strings, Shorty recounted them carefully. Still two pencils short! Shorty found difficulty in swallowing. Somebody had been at the hiding place and had secured complete evidence of the crime!

This terrible fact that the guilty knowledge of the gang was shared by some person or persons unknown, by a detec-

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tive perhaps, or by the police, made cold chills chase themselves up and down Shorty's back. But the very tension produced by the horror of the catastrophe drove him to action.



"I'll foil them," he muttered, "whoever they are."

Shorty went over into the garden and disinterred some dark object that had been buried under the grapevine. This he brought back and placed in the box in which the pencils had been hidden. The box was then carefully buried in the same spot.

"There, gosh darn 'em! Now let 'em dig for their evidence."

Shorty took the pencils to the barn and hid them on a beam above the haymow. This done, he scurried back to the house and regained his room without any one being aware of his entrance.

CHAPTER IX

In Which the Boys Decide to Take Uncle Ellery into Their Confidence.



SHORTY always kept in hand a series of leading strings almost too numerous and too trivial to record, but all very necessary and indispensable to the



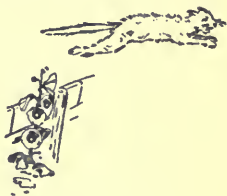
full and rounded boy life. One of his lines of research indicated a fondness for medical experiment, due either to the early working of the scientific mind, or to what his father called "just devilment."

The patent medicine habit had a strong hold in Stony Lonesome. One of the favorite remedies was a fiery brand of "painkiller" which many people will remember. When a sick boy saw the painkiller bottle, his recovery was magical. Shorty had discovered a new and a happier use for the medicine.

A strange tomcat had been hanging around, stealing a chicken now and then and fighting the local cats. By some

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device or other Shorty had made friends with this cat and as an experiment poured a few drops of the lotion on his back. Every one knows how cats dislike to have liquid on their fur. This animal hitched his back once or twice, but finding that he did not shake the moisture off, turned his head and licked the spot. Shorty said afterward that the cat rose straight up in the air about a yard, and then shot across the country like an arrow, just touching the high spots and the tops of the fences.



After this the boys watched for cats, which after one experience never came back. When the stray animals gave out, Shorty extended his operations to the neighborhood cats until people who saw their tame animals acting as if they "were going nowhere and trying to climb up on nothing," protested.

At another time Shorty soaked a kernel of corn in painkiller and tempted the rooster's appetite. That bird's feathers stood straight up on top of his head, his

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brow appeared to be wrinkled with anxiety, and he flew the coop crying:

"Fire!"

Shorty's father saw this episode, however, and all medical experiments came to a sudden stop; so sudden, in fact, that Shorty was rather painfully shaken up.

Another and a more satisfactory kind of a jar came from the kicking of the old shotgun that Uncle Ellery used to let the boys take occasionally. This arm was an old, double-barrelled, percussion-cap affair, with barrels that appeared to be nearly as thin as paper. Whether or not she kicked when Uncle Ellery handled her is not known, because Uncle Ellery maintained a discreet silence on her faults and was generously appreciative of her good qualities.

Doubtless the old arm was safe enough, but in the hands of the boys it had a strenuous recoil. There was a general feeling that the gun knew her master, but resented boy's play. Shorty had worked Uncle Ellery to let him take the gun, because he knew that there was under Mrs. Mason's barn a certain fur-

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bearing animal nameless in the presence of our fastidious readers. Altogether Shorty put in a good many hours watching for this animal to come out and act as target.

One day it appeared. It would have been better for all concerned if Shorty had backed out and gone home. But no boy ever hesitates to shoot at anything that wears fur.

Shorty rested the gun on the fence-top and pulled up the anchor. A report that sounded like the explosion of a few pounds of wet gun cotton, combined with a cloud of white smoke that hid the neighborhood for several seconds, followed. Shorty "came to," picked himself out of the cucumber vines and looked around for game. There was nothing in sight but a very gamy perfume that struck the neighborhood over the head, as it were, with a board. Mrs. Mason appeared in the



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barn door, holding her face in one hand while she gesticulated with the other. Shorty left as quickly as possible and never saw his fur-bearing friend again.



Every boy in Stony Lonesome used to shoot "patridges." The birds enjoyed the sport keenly

and the percentage of fatalities was small.

There used to be a wily old mother bird who lived in the woods back of the school house, where she had raised families for many years. Every boy in the neighborhood for several generations had shot at her, missed, grown old, passed the fowling piece down to his children, who in turn had shot at the bird, missed, and passed on.

Shorty met this bird one autumn day among the hazel bushes near the old beech tree. He suffered an attack of buck ague, but managed to unhitch the firearm. When the smoke cleared away, the bushes were there and the beech tree, but the partridge was gone and no shot marks could be found. Shorty had either fired into



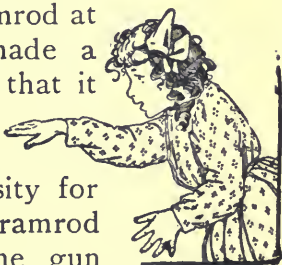
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the air, or the shot had leaked out because the newspaper wadding did not cover the charge.

Every boy at one time or another in his life gets his ramrod stuck in the gun and has to shoot it out. It is indeed a marvel that so many boys come to maturity. One day Shorty placed the butt of his gun on a rock, aimed it straight up into the air and fired the ramrod at the zenith; then he made a quick run for a tree so that it would not hit him on the head when it came down.

There was no necessity for so much caution. The ramrod never came back. The gun store had an extra supply of ramrods on hand and did a good business in them with the boys. When Shorty was obliged to confess the way in which the ramrod was lost, his father was agitated and spoke strongly about it.

The morning after the concert, when Shorty was at the neighbor's house playing tag with Jennie Forrest, they were disturbed by a noise like a locomo-



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tive whistling for a crossing. It was Spot Maloney. Shorty stirred uneasily.

"I guess I'll have to be going. Spot's come after me."

He answered Spot's signal with the war whoop of the Mohicans.

"Been playing with the girls!"

"I haven't, neither."

"Saw yer over to Jen Forrest's."

"None of yer business if I was."

"Girl Baby!"

"Say that again an' I'll lick yer."

"Well, warn't yer over there?"

"What of it, if I was?"

"Oh, nothin'."

"Nothin', is it?" Shorty spoke bitterly.

"Guess I'll play with any one I want for all of you."

"Huh!"

"Huh, yerself!"

"Say, Shorty!"

"What?"

"Yer can't be any kind of a feller and have anything to do with the girls."

"Wasn't Moccasin Mose all the time rescuing women from caves and from Indians?"



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This was a poser.

"Ye—es. But he didn't go to their house afterwards an' play with them."

This was another poser.

"Well, I'll go where I durn please."

"All right, go ahead."

"Well, I'm a-gointer—when I want'er."

"Say, Short!"

"What is it?"

"Let's go up on the house where the carpenter's ter work."

"All right."

The boys climbed up a ladder into a house that was under way and stood open mouthed, watching the workmen.

"Say, boys, don't you want to run down to Atkins's and ask him for my left-handed monkey wrench?"

"Sure."

The boys started on the run, anxious to be accomodating.

Mr. Atkins looked at them quizzically.

"That's funny. It's up at Jobson's."

The boys started for Jobson's. Jobson grinned and passed them to Watson. The "left-handed monkey wrench" joke served among workmen to keep boys



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on the run from place to place sometimes for an hour or two before they began to suspect treachery. Another form of this pleasantry was to send boys after "strap oil." The boy who asked for strap oil usually got the strap.

Shorty and Spot did not see through the game for an hour. They went to and fro until they found they were being sent to the same place twice. Then they went back to the house and took down the ladders under the impression that they were getting even. But they knew that this was a mere makeshift and that the insult was not by any means avenged. They scored a deep mark against carpenters.

Is it any wonder that boys' minds are full of suspicions and that their hands are against nearly everybody?

"Now they've thrown it into us that way," said Shorty dejectedly, "I suppose the next thing will be for the police to swoop down and gather us in. I'm a good mind to go down to the town hall and confess the whole thing. That might be the easiest way out. I can't stand this much longer."



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"Well, you would be a nice one," said Spot, in the deepest disgust. "I'm a good mind to kick you. You want to go to the reform school, don't you, and end up in jail and wear bed tickin'? Shucks! I was talking with Slim Jones and he says the thing to do is to destroy the evverdunce. He read it in *Old Sleuth*. When the evverdunce is destroyed they always fool the police for a long time."

Once more hope began to spring up in Shorty's breast.

"My gracious! We could do that easy. I wonder if we hadn't better ask Uncle Ellery about it?"

"Ask nothin'. We mustn't trust nobody in this."

After Spot had gone home Shorty dropped into Uncle Ellery's shop for a little conversation on his own hook.

"Say, Uncle Ellery, what would you do if you hadn't done nothin' and the police had a clear case against you? Course I don't mean me. But supposin' it was your case."

"Wal," said Uncle Ellery, "if I hadn't

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done nothin', I don't see how they could have a clear case against me."

"But supposin' a man had been murdered and they found his money hid in your cellar."

"Yes," replied Uncle Elery, "that's sarcumstantial evidence, to be sure. But when I say I didn't do it and my good standing in the

community backs me up, they look around pretty carefully, and sooner or later they find motives or clues that p'int to the right party. That is, they 'most always do. You know the story of the mule and the goat, don't you?"

"No, what is she?"

"Wal, the farmer was shoeing the mule out in the barnyard and the goat was near by. The farmer turned 'round and bent over to pick up a shoe and the mule kicked him right on the bend. When he came to, the mule charged the goat with the crime of buttin'. In the excitement, the rooster lost his head and declared it was his opinion



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that the goat did it. In fact, he said he saw him do it. The goat would have stood a mighty poor show if the mule's hoof print, exact form and size, hadn't been found on the farmer. See? That simple fact overturned the rooster's evidence and the mule got a sentence of hard labor. The cases ain't exactly parallel, but they show what I mean."

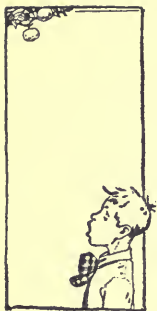
Shorty laughed.

"Say, I'll see you again. P'raps I'll have something to spring on you."

"All right, spring away!" said Uncle Ellery. "I'll do the best I can for you."

Shorty left the shop and by a kind of boy instinct made his way toward the swimming hole behind the factory. It was a warm day and he felt morally certain of finding Spot somewhere near the river. Shorty had brooded over the matter so much that the indelible pencils reached out skeleton hands and clutched at his heart every time anybody said "police." Unfortunately, too, it was considered humorous by some of the boys to shout, "The police are coming," and then run in an attempt to start a panic. So

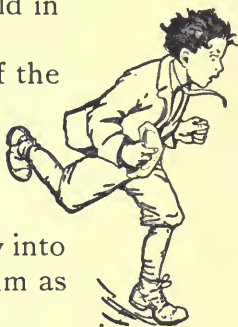
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many of the boys had minor derelictions on their minds such as window smashing, ticktacking, or stealing apples, that their fears were seriously worked on by these alarms, and under the present circumstances it can readily be seen that the cry was particularly startling to Shorty.

It must not be thought for a moment that the police force of Stony Lonesome was dangerous. It consisted merely of a town marshal and a night watch, both as harmless as the Scotland Yard detectives in the Sherlock Holmes stories. But their names had been used by so many mothers to frighten small boys into obedience that their functions were held in awe in Stony Lonesome.

In addition to the fear of the police, every time Shorty went down town he had to pass Spaulding's store, from which he expected to see Mr. Spaulding leap violently into the street and denounce him as a thief and a robber.



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At the swimming hole Shorty found Spot and Slim Jones sitting on the wharf whittling tomahawks out of a piece of clapboard taken from the new house. The thin edge of the clapboard served as the blade of the weapon.



"Hello, Shorty!" said one of the boys.
"Going down town to-night?"

"What for?"

"The engine's goin' to squirt."

"We heard the captain tell one of the carpenters up to the new house."

"Durn if I want to go down town! Spauldin'll nab us sure some day. I'll bet anything he's got a detective in his cellar now."

"Aw, go 'way!"

"That's all right. But I'd like to know who's got stolen property hidden on their premises!"

Spot and Slim wiggled uneasily.

"Yes, sir, that thing's bound to come out. Everybody's talkin' about it. My gracious, it's awful! We've got to do something."

Slim Jones was wiggling around in a

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way that showed that a new idea was struggling to get to the surface.

"Let's swear Uncle Ellery in secrecy and offer to divvy the reward with him if he gets the money."

"It's the thing to do," said Shorty. "Uncle Ellery won't turn us over to the police."

"You bet he wouldn't if we'd stole the stuff ourselves."

Spot demurred to this plan for a time but was finally talked around to it.



"What are you going to do with the fifty dollars reward? It's always fifty, isn't it?" This from Slim Jones.

"I dunno."

"Say, I'd get a gun with it, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, and a steam yacht to put on the river."

"I want one of them yeller setting dogs."

"And a bowie knife."

"Golly!"

The boys had stopped their whittling and sat on the wharf rolling in wealth.



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"We can trust old Uncle El," said Shorty.

"Sure."

"Pa'd take all the money himself."

"P'raps that's so."

"Sure it is."

Then after a pause to give opportunity to dreams:

"Ain't it great?"

"You bet."

"Say, we're fixed for life now."

"What you goin' to do?"

"Oh, I dunno."

"Let's go out on the plains!"

"I'm thinking some of goin' to Europe for a few months."

"Durn Europe! I'd like to try Alaska. There's no end of money there."

"Alaska's too cold."

"California's pretty good."

"So's Idaho."

"Let's go down and see Uncle Ellery."

They found Uncle Ellery busy on a casket.

"Hello, Uncle!"



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"How air ye, boys? What's new? Got any strap oil lately?"

Uncle Ellery struck a quizzical attitude and looked down at the boys.

"Say, Uncle!"

"Wal?"

"We got a secret we wanter tell if you'll promise not to give us away."

"All right, let her come!"

"You won't give us away?"

"No, siree! I'll stand by you till kingdom come."

"You see there's money in it, and we want you to help us get it; then we'll divvy up."

Uncle Ellery knocked off work altogether. The idea of money acts strongly on the Anglo-Saxon mind.

"What you boys got up your sleeve?"

"Well, it's this way. We found some hidden treasure buried, an' we want to get the reward. There'll be four of us to divvy, you an' us three. We tell you where the stuff is buried an' you fix it with the police."

Uncle Ellery listened to the tale carefully. After it was finished, he said, "Say,

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you just leave this to me, and I'll fix it."

The boys did not say anything about Spaulding's store. They merely told of the discovery of the pencils and where they were now concealed.

As the boys left the shop in much better spirits than they had been for several days, a figure standing behind the window in the next store watched them with a smile of triumph. It was Peewee Jackson, the Boy Detective.



CHAPTER X

In Which Peewee's Coup d'État Fails to Accomplish Its Object.



WATCHING carefully dressed bankers and brokers painfully following the golf ball over hill and down dale, I have often wished that they could be induced to play kick-the-stick in the way in which the boys played it in Stony Lonesome. For this strenuous form of sport, if the wealthy man adopted it, each millionaire would have to provide himself a good, stout stick. A fleshy banker with the gout would be chosen goal keeper. He would place his stick, a stout piece of elm or hickory about a foot long, carefully against the corner of the barn. Then the wealthy and distinguished president of a trust company would be chosen to "knock off." Taking his golf club, he would knock the stick half a block. Then all the millionaires would scatter like jack rabbits and hide under the barns, on

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the roofs around the corner, under the sidewalk—anywhere out of sight. The fleshy old banker with the gout would make a hurried run to replace the stick. As long as it reclined against the goal, he might “taggoul” for any millionaire he saw. If, on the other hand, while he was out hunting for prey, another millionaire rushed in and knocked the stick, the game would be blocked for the goal keeper until he replaced it.



Finally the goal keeper would see some wealthy oil merchant's glasses peering over the roof of the house, and he would emit a terrible yell:

“I seen J. Foster Calkins of the Pennsylvania Oil Company! Taggoul for J. Foster Calkins!”

Then J. Foster would become goal keeper, and the game would stop while everybody hollered:

“All in free!”

There's where your bankers



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and merchants would get exercise, shining up and down water pipes, crawling under sidewalks and jumping fences. And fun! For pure fun, kick-the-stick beats the earth!



While Shorty and the gang were attempting to forget their troubles in this highly diverting game, in fact had for the moment forgotten them utterly and were emptying a car load of noise on the streets of "our quiet town," a visitor to Uncle Ellery would have found that genial raconteur's temper sadly ruffled. Some one, doubtless one of the larger boys who trained with Breezy Martin, had stolen one of his coffins. This in Stony Lonesome was considered a rare bit of humor.

"If the cuss wasn't so all-fired little," said Uncle Ellery viciously, "I'd believe Peewee Jackson had done it."

Uncle Ellery knew that if he kept quiet, the missing article would soon appear in some way or other when the practical joke, for which it was taken, was ripe. So

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he went on about his work apparently undisturbed, though a little ruffled inwardly. Later in the morning he noticed Peewee Jackson's nose flattened against the pane of his shop window. Peewee was doing detective work. He would have scorned the thought of entering Uncle Ellery's shop without carefully looking over the ground in advance. Uncle Ellery beckoned to him to enter and Peewee sidled in.

"Say, Peewee," said Uncle Ellery, "do you know who took my coffin?"



Peewee's face expressed so much astonishment that Uncle Ellery saw at once that he knew nothing about the raid on the shop.

"Naw! When'd you lose her?"

"Oh, some of you fellers toted her off las' night, I guess."

"Say, I believe I know who done it!"

A brilliant Scotland Yard idea had come to Peewee.

"You go an' look up in Shorty Hitchcock's barn!"

"Shorty!"

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Uncle Ellery knocked off work in the utmost astonishment. Then he laughed.

"Those little devils wouldn't steal from me."

"Wouldn't they?" Peewee was grimly mysterious. "I know where they've got plunder planted an' I kin prove it. I've seen it!"

"Did ye see my coffin there?" Uncle Ellery was leading Peewee on.

"No, I didn't, but it was several days ago I saw their plant. But that gang's equal to anything."

"If you know where the stuff's hid and don't inform on the thieves you are in danger of being accused, too," said Uncle Ellery.

"I know my game," said Peewee soberly, "an' I'm going to spring the trap when I'm good and ready."

Uncle Ellery had to laugh.

"Say, you'll be on the force some day."

"That's all right."

"Sure thing."

Uncle Ellery went on with his work and Peewee went out. As he



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passed down the street, he began to fear that he had given his information away.

"My gosh! Don't I know enough yet to keep my mouth shut?"

Peewee kicked himself mentally and went off to find Bill Kendall, the officer.

Old Sleuth had not been gone very long before Shorty, Spot, and Slim Jones wandered into Uncle Ellery's shop.

"Say, boys," said Uncle Ellery, "did you tell Peewee Jackson about your plant?"

"Peewee!"

The boys looked at one another in horror.

"No, sir; we wouldn't tell Peewee for nothin'."

"Well, I'm afraid Peewee's going to make us trouble. Suppose we go up and look at your plunder."

"What's Peewee know?" asked Shorty.

"He says he knows where your plant is."

"My gosh! It's Peewee got the pencils!" said Shorty.

"Wal," said Uncle Ellery, "you didn't steal 'em. He can't hurt you none. We'll go up to the house an' look 'em over."

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Uncle Ellery got into his coat, locked his inner door, leaving the outer shop open, and started up the street with the boys. On the way Shorty whispered something to him that made him laugh. There was a general feeling that the explosion was near. The air was full of electricity. As they came in sight of Shorty's house, Spot grabbed Shorty by the arm and in a voice of horror exclaimed:

"My gosh, look there!"

Over in the Hitchcock yard stood Bill Kendall and Peewee Jackson talking with Mr. Hitchcock.

"Come on, boys," said Uncle Ellery. "I'll stand by you."

"Henry," said Mr. Hitchcock, "what does this mean? Henry Jackson says that you have stolen property secreted in these premises."

"Yes," said Peewee, "an' it's buried in that corner."

"Then why don't you dig her up?" asked Shorty.

"Henry," said Mr. Hitchcock

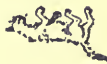


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severely, "have you any stolen property buried there?"

"No, sir!"

"Dig her up," said Peewee, the Red Avenger.

Bill Kendall took the spade Shorty procured and lifted the turf. A shovel or two of earth was scooped away and the box came to view. Peewee reached down and opened it and started back with surprise. In it was—a dead  cat.

"Looky here," said Bill Kendall furiously to Peewee. "You fade away quick or I'll clap you in jail."

"But"—began Peewee.

"You fade!"

Peewee was frightened and hurried away on the run. Uncle Ellery was chuckling audibly and Mr. Hitchcock was mildly amused.



"Now," said Uncle Ellery, "let's get at the facts. Boys, bring your plunder out."

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Shorty produced the pencils and told his story of the find.

"They came from the Spaulding's store robbery, I guess," said Shorty, "and me and Spot and Slim thought we'd claim the fifty dollars reward for finding stolen property."

"Spaulding's store robbed!"

Both Uncle Ellery and Bill Kendall burst into loud laughter and Mr. Hitchcock smiled.

"Spaulding's store wasn't never robbed," said the officer.

"But it said so in the paper," said Shorty.

"That was an April fool publication, Henry," said Mr. Hitchcock. "The editor put it in as a joke."

"Then whose pencils are they?"

"Wal," remarked Uncle Ellery, "come to think of it, old Matherson, the hermit, used to live up in them woods. He sold indelible pencils until he took sick and went to the poorhouse. Probably the boys have found his old nest. He used to hide his stuff because he was afraid of robbers."



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"Say, then we've been worrying about nothing."

It was Shorty who spoke.

"That's what people usually worry about," replied Uncle Ellery.

"Then our fifty dollars"—— Slim Jones saw the foolishness of the question before it was asked and ended up with, "Come on boys, let's go in swimmin' again."

And the boys scurried away laughing and whooping. At any rate the burden of the fear was lifted, even if the fifty dollars had gone glimmering.

"But say, we'll fix that Peewee," said



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Spot. 'I'll lick him within an inch of his life.'

"He ain't no kind of a detective," said Slim.

"I don't believe he could detect that skunk under Mrs. Mason's barn," said Shorty with much contempt.

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There has not been much of a story told in this book and it does not need much of an ending. In fact it never has ended. The old place is right on earth still and the game of life is going on without interruption.

It would be difficult to tell all that happened during those happy years in Stony Lonesome, of which Shorty and Spot were the greater part. Things were always happening there. When the river came up in the spring floods and stood around in the post office, delaying the United States mail, Shorty fell from a cake of ice he was trying to navigate and was nearly drowned. The horse took a kick at him once, and later he was chased across the pasture by a cross bull. Twice

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he fell from the barn window. Once he ran away out West to shoot Indians and was nearly five miles from home before he decided to give it up. The teacher reached for him with the ruler rather too often for comfort. Uncle Ellery we had always with us. Shorty used to marvel a good deal at his stories until one day he got hold of the old patent medicine almanac that grandpa used to hang up by a string behind the stove, and there he found several stories that Uncle Ellery had appropriated, slyly putting himself in as the hero.



As time went on, many of the boys left the old home and scattered over the country. They are playing other games now, games of politics and finance that seem to them more serious and important. I wonder if they are?

When Judge Hitchcock (Shorty) returned from the Old Home celebration last year, he said that the old place was still a bit rocky—and a little lonesome without Uncle Ellery.

We heard with pained surprise that Frankie Foster had lived down



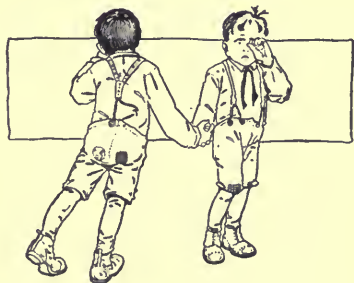
Stony Lonesome

his reputation as the good boy. He used sea language and was not quite so fastidious about the use of tobacco as he might have been.

In Henry Jackson, the well-known Boston detective, who traced out the Farmington bank robbery, we recognized Peewee again—still on the trail.

Spot Maloney?

Oh, Spot is in Kansas City and doing very well. In fact, we are all doing very well indeed, thank God, and could we get as far away from the present as we are from the Stony Lonesome days, the present itself would appear as full of glory as those old days do now.



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